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VIII.

CAPTAIN SPITFIRE

AND

THE UNLUCKY TREASURE:

TWO SPANISH NOVELETTES.

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VIII.

CAPTAIN SPITFIRE

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THE UNLUCKY TREASURE:

Two Spanish Fobelettes.

By P. A. DE ALARCON.

LONDON:

VIZETELLY & Co., 42, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND
1886.

LONDON:

W. I. RICHARDSON, PRINTER, 4 AND 5, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

CAPTAIN SPITFIRE.

INTRODUCTION.

ON the afternoon of the 26th of March, 1848, knives were freely used and shots exchanged, in the streets of Madrid, between a handful of peasants, whose last expiring cry was "Long live the Republic!" and the army of the Spanish monarchy, whose visible chief at that time was Don Ramon Maria Narvaez, President of the Council of Ministers of Queen Isabella II., and Minister of War.

These few historical facts being communicated to the reader, we will now pass on to matters less familiar, but more agreeable, and which originated in the lamentable occurrences above referred to.

I.

ON the ground floor of an humble, but pretty and clean-looking house in the narrow winding street styled the Calle de Preciados, the scene of the disturbances we have just mentioned, there lived alone—that is to say, without the company of any of the male sex—three good and religious women, who differed very much from one another both in personal appearance and the nature of their dispositions; one being a widow lady, a native of Guipuzcoa, of a grave and

distinguished aspect; the second, her daughter, young, unmarried, a native of Madrid, and very pretty and charming, but altogether of a different type to that of her mother; and the third, their servant, whom it is quite impossible to describe, she being of no particular age or figure, and scarcely of determinable sex. This creature had been baptised at Mondonnedo, in Galicia, and, following the example of the Señor Curate who officiated at the ceremony, we have shown her too much favour in recognising that she belonged to the human species at all.

The daughter seemed the symbol, or living representative in petticoats, of common sense; there was such a happy equilibrium between her beauty and her unaffected, natural manners, between her elegance and simplicity, her grace and modesty. She commonly passed through the public streets unnoticed, without calling forth those gallant observations usually bestowed on pretty women when unescorted; but as soon as anyone's attention was fixed on her, it was impossible for him not to be enraptured with her many charms. She was not, and certainly had no wish to be, one of those loud, showy, provocative beauties that attract all eyes as soon as they make their appearance in a drawing-room, a theatre, or on a public promenade, and who compromise or extinguish the poor fellow who accompanies them, whether he be their sweetheart, husband, or father, or Prester John of the Indies himself.

She seemed a wise and harmonious union of physical and moral perfections, the extraordinary regularity of which did not at once excite enthusiasm, just as peace and order do not excite enthusiasm, and a well-proportioned piece of sculpture neither shocks nor astonishes us until we realise the fact that if every detail appears graceful, easy, and natural, it is because all are equally beautiful.

It might be said that this honoured divinity of the middle classes had studied how to dress, arrange her hair, look, walk, and, in short, bear the treasures of her splendid youth in such a manner that none should believe her to be vain, forward, or seductive, but entirely different from the marriageable deities who make a market of their charms, and pursue their way as if announcing to everybody: "This house to be sold or—to be let."

But we will not detain the reader with flourishes of rhetoric or tedious sketches, for we have a great deal to say and only a limited time at our disposal.

II.

THE Republicans were firing at the royal troops from the corner of the Calle de Peregrinos, and the soldiers were returning their fire from the Puerto del Sol in such a way that the musket balls of both parties whisked past the windows of the before mentioned ground floor, when they did not strike the iron bars, making these vibrate with a grating noise, and damaging shutters, woodwork, and window-panes by the rebound.

Equally profound, although different in its nature and expression, was the terror felt by the mother and the servant. The noble-minded widow feared first of all for her daughter, then for the rest of human kind, and lastly for herself; whilst the Galician trembled above all for her own beloved skin, then for her own and her mistresses' stomachs, for the large earthen water jar was almost empty and the baker had not made his appearance with the afternoon's bread, and thirdly, a little for such natives of Galicia, soldiers or peasants, as might be killed or injured in the affray.

We have not spoken of the daughter's terror, because, whether curiosity had neutralised it, or fear had no place in her masculine rather than feminine heart, the case was that the gentle damsel, disregarding the advice and commands of her mother and the lamentations or howls of the servant—both of whom had hidden themselves in inner rooms—ran from time to time to the apartments looking upon the street, and even opened the closed shutters, in order to form an accurate idea concerning the state of affairs.

When making one of these extremely dangerous reconnaissances, she saw that the soldiers had advanced up to the door of the house, whilst the rebels were retreating towards the Plaza de San Domingo, not without making an occasional stand, when they fired with admirable coolness and bravery. And she likewise saw at the head of the soldiers, and even of the officers, a man about forty years old who was distinguishing himself by his energy and intrepidity, and the ardent phrases with which he harangued his comrades. This man was of a noble and elegant appearance, and refined and handsome, though severe physiognomy, sparely but strongly built, rather tall than short, and dressed partly as a civilian, partly as a soldier. We mean that he wore a forage cap with the three gold lace stripes of a captain, and a civilian's surtout and trousers, both of black cloth, and carried an infantry officer's sword and a sportsman's cartridge-case and fowling-piece.

The young lady stood regarding and admiring this singular personage, when the Republicans discharged their muskets at him, considering him, doubtless, more formidable than all the rest, perhaps a general, a minister, or some such dignitary, and the poor captain, or whatever he was, fell to the ground as if struck by lightning, and with his face bathed in blood; whereupon the rebels fled joyfully, well satisfied with their

work, and pursued by the soldiers, burning to avenge their unfortunate leader. The street became quiet and solitary, the brave gentleman, perchance still alive, and whom kind and pious hands could probably save from death, lying bleeding in the middle of it.

The damsel did not hesitate a moment; she ran to her mother and the servant, explained the matter, told them that there was no longer any firing in the street, contended not so much with the generous widow's very prudent objections as with the Galician's purely animal fears; and a few minutes later the three women had carried to their honest dwelling, and placed upon the widow's comfortable bed in an alcove of the principal room the insensible body of him who, if he were not the real hero of the day of the 26th March, will be that of our particular history.

III.

THE charitable women were not long before they discovered that the Captain was not dead, but merely unconscious, the effect of a musket-ball that had struck him slantingly on the forehead without penetrating it deeply. They also perceived that a ball had passed through and probably fractured the right leg, and that it was necessary for every attention to be at once given to the wound, from which much blood was flowing. They recognised, in short, that the only truly useful and efficacious thing they could do was immediately to call in a medical man.

"Mamma," said the valiant damsel, "Doctor Sanchez lives only a couple of steps from here on the opposite side of the way. Let Rosa go and fetch him. It will take but a moment, and there is no danger."

Just then a shot was heard close by, followed by five or six others, discharged all at once and at a greater distance. Then deep silence reigned again.

"I won't go," growled the servant; "there's firing going on still, and I'm sure you wouldn't like me to be shot while crossing the street."

"Stupid creature! there's nothing happening in the street," replied the young lady, who was looking out of one of the windows.

"Come away from there, Augustias," cried the mother, on observing her.

"The shot we just heard," continued the young lady called Augustias, "and to which the soldiers at the Puerta del Sol replied, must have been fired by an ill-looking man from the garret at No. 9, where I see him again loading his gun. The balls consequently pass very high, and there is no danger in crossing our street. And, besides, it would be the greatest of infamies if we allowed this unfortunate man to die merely to save ourselves from a slight inconvenience."

"I will go and fetch the doctor," said the mother, who had just finished binding up the Captain's broken leg after a fashion.

"You certainly shall not," cried the daughter, approaching the bed. "What would people say of me? I will go, because I am younger and can get there quicker. You have risked quite enough in the other wars."

"Never mind, you shall not go," replied the mother, imperiously.

"Nor I either," added the servant.

"Mamma, let me go. I beg of you to do so in my father's name. I have not the heart to let this brave man bleed to death when we can save him. See, see what little use your

bandages are. The blood is trickling from under the mattress."

"Augustias, I say you must not go."

"I will not go if you do not wish it. But, dear mamma, think of my poor father, your high-minded and valiant husband, who would not have died as he did, having bled to death in the middle of a wood on the night of a battle, if some merciful hand had staunched the blood issuing from his wounds."

"Augustias!"

"Mamma, let me! I am an Aragonese like my father, although I was born in this wicked Madrid. Besides, I do not think there is any Bull which commands us women to exhibit less valour than men."

Thus spoke the brave girl; and her mother had not recovered from the amazement, accompanied by moral submission or involuntary approval, which this noble speech inspired, before Augustias was boldly crossing the Calle de Preciados.

IV.

"SEE, Señora! Look how nicely she goes!" exclaimed the Galician, clapping her hands, and looking at our heroine from the window.

But, alas! at that moment a gun was discharged close by; and the poor mother, who also had approached the window, seeing her daughter stop and feel her dress, uttered a piercing cry and fell on her knees, almost deprived of consciousness.

"They have not hit her! They have not hit her!" cried the servant. "She is entering the house opposite. You need not be afraid, Señora."

But the latter did not hear her. Pale as a corpse, she

struggled against her faintness, until, finding strength in her own grief, she rose, half-distracted, and ran to the street, where she met Augustias returning home, followed by the doctor. Mother and daughter embraced, kissing one another rapturously, while unconsciously standing over a pool of blood that had flowed from the Captain's wounds. At last they entered the house without anyone observing that the young lady's petticoats were pierced by the treacherous bullet fired by the man in the garret on seeing her cross the street.

It was the Galician, who not only discovered the injury, but was cruel enough to mention the fact aloud :

"They' have hit her ! They have hit her !" she exclaimed. "I'm glad I didn't go. The balls would have gone through and through my petticoats."

Imagine what was the renewed terror of the poor mother until Augustias had convinced her that she was unhurt. Suffice it to say that from that terrible day the unhappy widow, as we shall see in the course of our narrative, did not enjoy an hour of health. But let us return to the unfortunate Captain, and see what opinion the skilful and assiduous Doctor Sanchez formed concerning his wounds.

This member of the faculty enjoyed an enviable reputation, and once more justified it by his rapid and happy treatment of our hero, staunching the blood from his wounds with domestic remedies, and reducing and bandaging the fracture of the leg without other help than that of the three women. But as an expositor of his art, he did not shine so well. He undertook to say that the Captain would not die, "provided that within twenty-four hours he recovered from his present profound lethargy, which was an indication of grave cerebral disturbance, the result of a lesion in the forehead, caused by an obliquely striking projectile fired from a

gun, but without fracturing, although certainly contusing the frontal bone; the said cerebral disturbance being precisely in the part where the wound was situated, and the whole resulting from our unfortunate civil discords, in which the poor man appeared to have taken an active part." And the doctor added, by way of commentary, that if the aforesaid cerebral disturbance did not cease within the time specified, the Captain would assuredly die, a proof of the great force with which the projectile had struck his unfortunate patient. As to whether it would or would not cease before the expiration of twenty-four hours, he reserved his prognosis until the following afternoon.

Having uttered these trite remarks, he enjoined his listeners with great emphasis—for he was well acquainted with the disposition of Eve's daughters—that when the wounded man recovered consciousness, they should neither permit him to speak, nor speak to him of anything, however urgent the matter might appear to be; he then gave them verbal instructions and written prescriptions to meet any accident that might supervene; and, promising on the solemn word of a good physician to return next day, whether there were firing in the streets or not, he marched off home in case he should be summoned on a similar errand, but not before counselling the almost prostrated widow to retire to her room early, for her pulse was irregular, and it was very possible a little fever might come on during the night.

V.

It was three o'clock in the morning, and the noble minded lady, although she felt very unwell, continued at the invalid's bedside, regardless of the solicitations of the

indefatigable Augustias, who was also in attendance, and had not, in fact, rested herself the whole night.

Erect and quiet as a statue, the young lady remained at the foot of the blood-stained bed, with her eyes fixed on the thin pale face—resembling that of a Christ carved in ivory—of the valiant warrior whom she had so much admired during the afternoon; and in this attitude she waited with visible uneasiness until he should safely awake from that profound lethargy which might terminate in death.

The thrice happy Galician was seated in the best arm-chair of the room, engaged in the pleasant occupation of snoring, if the horrible noise she made merits that name, with her head glued to her knees, she having overlooked the fact that the chair-back was expressly adapted to one's reclining against it at one's ease.

Various observations or conjectures had crossed the minds of both mother and daughter, during their long watching, as to what might be the Captain's social rank, character, ideas, and sentiments. With the minute attention which women never fail to pay, even under the most terrible and solemn circumstances, they had noted the fineness of his linen, the elegance of his watch, the comeliness of his person, and the marquis's coronet embroidered on his stockings. Nor did they fail to observe an antique gold medallion hanging round his neck under his clothes, nor that this medallion represented the *Virgen del Pilar de Saragossa*: all which gave them great pleasure, as they felt justified in inferring from these circumstances that the Captain was a person of distinction and of good and Christian breeding. What they naturally respected was the inside of his pockets, where perhaps there were letters or cards indicating his name and address—information which they hoped to heaven he would himself be able to give as soon as he recovered consciousness and speech.

Meanwhile, although the affray was ended, the Monarchy coming off victorious, there was heard from time to time, now a distant and unanswered discharge of firearms, as a solitary protest of some Republican not yet converted by grapeshot, now the sonorous trot of the cavalry patrols going their rounds to assure public order—sounds both lugubrious and prophetic, very sad to hear at the bedside of a soldier wounded and nearly dead.

At about half-past three o'clock the Captain suddenly opened his eyes, glanced sullenly around the room, looked successively at Augustias and her mother, with a certain kind of puerile terror, and murmured peevishly :

“Where the devil am I?”

The young lady raised a finger to her lips, to signify that he was to hold his tongue ; but the widow, not considering the third word of the question a very proper one, hastened to reply :

“You are in a safe and respectable place, the house of General Barbastro's widow, the Countess de Santurce.”

“Women ! the deuce !” muttered the Captain, again closing his eyes, as if resuming his lethargy. But very soon he appeared to breathe with the freedom and strength of one who sleeps calmly.

“He is saved !” said Augustias. “My father will be pleased with us.”

“I was praying for his soul,” replied the mother ; “although as you see, our invalid's first salutation to us leaves much to be desired.”

“I know by heart,” slowly broke forth the Captain, without opening his eyes, “the list of the general staff of the Spanish army inserted in the Madrid Directory, and there is no mention in it, nor has mention been made during this century, of any General Barbastro.”

"I will tell you," eagerly exclaimed the widow. "My late husband—"

"Don't answer, mamma," interrupted the young lady, smiling. "He is delirious, and we must take care of his poor head. Remember Doctor Sanchez's injunctions."

The Captain opened his fine eyes and looked fixedly at Augustias, and again closed them, saying more slowly than before :

"I am never delirious, Señorita. The only thing is, I always speak the truth, whatever happens."

And having uttered this, syllable by syllable, he sighed deeply, doubtless fatigued from so much talking, and then began to breathe heavily, as if about to pass away.

"Are you asleep, Captain?" asked the widow, much alarmed.

The wounded man made no reply.

VI.

"He seems to be asleep now," said Augustias in a low voice, taking a seat by her mother's side ; "and as I believe that he cannot hear us, let me mention one thing to you, mamma. I don't think you did well to say you were a countess and a general's widow."

"Why?"

"Because, you know, we have not sufficient means to take care of and wait upon a person like him in the same way a real countess could do."

"What do you mean by a real countess?" exclaimed the elder lady, sharply. "Surely you have no doubts as to my rank ; I am as much a countess as the Countess de Montijo, and my husband was as much a general as Espartero !"

"You are quite right; but until the proceedings you have taken to establish your title, and obtain the pension of a general's widow are decided by the Government in your favour, we shall remain very poor."

"Not so very poor! I have still a thousand reals left from the price of the emerald-set rings that I sold, and I have a necklace of pearls with a clasp of brilliants, given me by my grandfather, valued at more than five hundred duros, a sum sufficient to live upon till the termination of my suit, which will be within a month, and, indeed, sufficient to enable us to provide for this poor man, as God commands, even if his broken leg obliges him to remain here two or three months. You know that one of the judges is of opinion that I ought to receive the benefits of Article 10 of the Convention of Vergara; for although your father died prior to its being signed, there is no doubt that he was acting in conjunction with Maroto."

"Santurce! Santurce! There is no such count's name in the Directory," murmured the Captain, without opening his eyes.

Then, suddenly throwing off his lethargy, and almost succeeding in sitting up in bed, he said, in a clear and vibrating voice, as if he were again well:

"Come to the point, Señora. I want to know where I am and who you are. None can rule or deceive me. The devil! How my leg does pain me!"

"Señor Captain, do not insult us," exclaimed the widow, rather warmly.

"Come, Captain, be quiet, and hold your tongue," said Augustias, with suavity, although she felt annoyed. "You will run great danger if you speak and move about. Your right leg is broken, and you have a wound in your forehead, that has deprived you of consciousness for more than ten hours."

"It is too true," exclaimed the eccentric personage, raising his hands to his head and feeling the bandages placed there by the doctor. "Those rascals have wounded me. But who has been so stupid as to bring me to a strange house when I have one of my own, and there are civil and military hospitals? I hate incommoding anyone or receiving favours, which I'm d——d if I deserve, or wish to deserve. I was in the Calle de Preciados—"

"And you are still in the same street, at No. 14, ground floor," interrupted the widow, paying no attention to her daughter's signs to keep silent. "We do not want you to be grateful to us, for we have not done, and will not do, more than God commands and charity ordains. For the rest, you are in a respectable house. I am Doña Teresa Carrillo de Albornoz y Azpeitia, widow of the Carlist General Don Luis Gonzaga de Barbastro, who owed his title of Count de Santurce to a Royal edict of Don Carlos V., which Doña Isabelle II. ought to declare valid, according to the tenour of Article 10 of the Convention of Vergara. I never tell lies, nor go by false names, nor do I purpose to do anything else with you than to try and save your life, Providence having confided that task to me."

"Mamma, do not irritate him," observed Augustias. "You see, instead of being appeased, he is going to reply more violently than ever. And the poor fellow is very ill, and wanders in his mind. Come, Señor Captain, be quiet, and think a little of your life."

Such were the words of the kind damsel, uttered with her accustomed gravity. But the Captain was not appeased. He looked at her from head to foot with still greater fury, like a wild boar whom a new and more terrible adversary is about to attack, and exclaimed, angrily:

"Señorita! In the first place, my mind does not wander,

and has never done so ; in the second, I very much resent your speaking to me with such superfluous commiseration and blandness, for I do not understand courtesies, suavities, and flatteries. Pardon the rudeness of my words, for everyone is as God has made him, and I do not want to deceive anybody. I do not know by what law of my nature it is that I should prefer being shot at to being treated with kindness. I warn you, therefore, not to bestow so much attention on me, for if you do, you will be the cause of my suffocating in this bed, to which my bad fortune has bound me. I was not born to receive favours, nor to bestow or repay them ; and, consequently, I have always tried to avoid the company of ladies, children, hypocrites, or any other pacific and timid persons. I am a daring fellow, whom no one has been able to endure since my birth—neither as a boy, nor as a youth, nor as an old man, which I am now becoming. All Madrid calls me Captain Spitfire. So you may sit down and arrange when I shall be taken to the hospital on a stretcher. I have finished."

"Dear me ! what a man !" exclaimed the horrified Doña Teresa.

"All men should be as I am," replied the Captain. "The world would go on much better, or rather it would have ended long ago."

Augustias smiled.

"Do not smile, Señorita ; that is scoffing at a poor invalid, incapable of delivering you from his presence by flight," continued the wounded man, with a slight expression of melancholy. "I know that I seem to you very ill-bred, but believe me I don't resent your thinking so ; on the contrary, I should resent it if you first held me worthy of appreciation, and afterwards accused me of being the cause of your having fallen into such an error. Oh, if I could but get hold of

the infamous rascal who brought me to this house, only to incommode you and dishonour me."

"It was we who carried you here—I, the Señora, and the Señorita," broke forth the Galician, who had been awakened and attracted by the noise of this argument. "You were bleeding outside the door, and the Señorita took pity on you. I was also a little sorry for you, and, as the Señora was sorry too, we all three carried you in, and very heavy you are, though you look so thin."

The Captain was again becoming very angry, seeing another woman appear on the scene; but the Galician's account impressed him so much, that he could not help saying,

"I am very sorry that this good work was not done for a better man than I am. What necessity was there that you should become acquainted with Captain Spitfire?"

Doña Teresa looked at her daughter significantly, as if she wished to say that the poor man was, after all, less wicked and ferocious than he represented himself to be; and Augustias smiled in reply with exquisite grace, being evidently of the same opinion. In the meanwhile, the elegiacal Galician said, in lachrymose tones:

"The Señor would be still more sorry if he knew that the Señorita went herself to fetch the doctor, and that when the poor young lady was crossing the road they fired at her; and look, a ball went through her skirt."

"I should never have mentioned it to you, Señor Captain, for fear of irritating you," explained the damsel, in a modest though bantering tone of voice, casting down her eyes, and smiling more graciously than before. "But as Rosa has told you all, I must ask you to forgive me for the sake of the terror I caused my dear mother, and which has brought on slight fever."

The Captain, overwhelmed with astonishment, kept his mouth wide open, and looked alternately at Augustias, Doña Teresa, and the servant; and when the young lady ceased speaking, he closed his eyes, uttered a kind of groan, and, raising his clenched hands to heaven, exclaimed:

"Cruel people! Then you three are determined to make me your slave or laughing-stock; to make me weep and utter soft words! I would not if I yield! But I will escape! A pretty thing if, at my age, I am to be the sport of the tyranny of three women! Señora," he continued, with great emphasis, addressing the widow, "if you do not this very moment retire to your room, and when you are in bed take a nap or two, I will tear off all these bandages and rags and die in five minutes, which God forbid. As to you, Señorita Augustias, do me the favour to call in a watchman, and tell him to go to the house of the Marquis de los Tomillares, No. 12, Avenue de San Francisco, and say that his nephew, Don Jorge de Cordoba, awaits him here seriously wounded. Then you must retire too, and leave me in the hands of this insupportable Galician, who can give me occasionally a little sugar and water, the only refreshment I shall need till my Uncle Alvaro arrives. Now I've spoken. Countess, and you must begin by going to bed."

The mother and daughter nodded to one another, and the former replied, soothingly:

"I will give you an example of obedience and good sense. Good night, Señor Captain, till to-morrow."

"And I also will be obedient," added Augustias, after writing down the choleric Captain's name and his uncle's address. "But as I am very sleepy, allow me to put off sending that message to the Marquis de los Tomillares till to-morrow. Good night, Señor Don Jorge, until then. Don't forget to keep quiet."

"I'm not going to 'stay up alone with the gentleman!" cried the Galician. "His devil's temper makes my hair stand on end, and I'm all of a tremble, like a fawn."

"Be easy, pretty one!" replied the Captain. "You will find me gentler and more amiable with you than with your young mistress."

Doña Teresa and Augustias could not resist laughing on hearing this first good-humoured sally of their almost insupportable guest.

And now you see, reader, how such mournful and tragic scenes, as those of that afternoon and evening, were concluded and crowned by a little joy and merriment. So certain is it that all is fleeting and transitory in this world, happiness as well as grief, for, in the words of the proverb, there is no good or evil under any roof which lasts for a hundred years.

VII.

At eight o'clock the same morning, when, by God's mercy, there were no signs of barricades or riot, Doctor Sanchez was in the house of the so-called Countess de Santurce for the purpose of subjecting the choleric Captain's broken leg to a final operation.

That morning the patient had taken a fancy to remain silent. Before the painful instruments were used he had only opened his mouth on one occasion, when he addressed some brief and harsh observations to Doña Teresa and Augustias, in reply to the courteous "Good morning" they saluted him with.

To the mother he said :

"Good heavens, Señora! Why on earth have you got up, when you are so ill? Do you want to make my shame and

ignominy still greater? Are you determined to kill me by dint of kindness?"

And to the daughter:

"Whatever does it matter to you whether I am better or worse? Come to the point. Have you sent to my uncle, so that he may remove me from here, and deliver me from all fuss and ceremony?"

"Yes, my angry Captain; half an hour ago the porter left with the message," tranquilly replied the young lady, arranging the pillows.

As regards the susceptible Countess, it is unnecessary to say that she was again vexed with her guest on hearing his violent language. She decided to speak to him no more, and confined herself to making lint and bandages; occasionally asking the imperturbable Doctor Sanchez, with deep interest, how the wounded man was progressing (without condescending to mention the latter by name), whether he would be lame, if he might take at noon a little chicken and ham broth, and whether it was necessary to have sand strewn in the street, so that the noise of the carriages should not annoy him.

The medical man, with his accustomed skill, ascertained that there was nothing to fear from the wound in the forehead, thanks to the vigorous constitution of the invalid, in whom there were now no symptoms of cerebral disturbance or fever; but the doctor's diagnosis was not so favourable regarding the fracture of the leg. He again described this as grave and dangerous—the tibia being much injured—and recommended Don Jorge absolute rest, if he was anxious to escape the performance of an amputation and the risk even of death itself. The doctor expressed himself strongly and plainly, not alone through lack of art in concealing his ideas, but because he had already formed an opinion as to the wilful

and unruly character of his patient. But he did not, in fact, succeed in terrifying him, for his words were received only with a smile of incredulity and scorn.

He did, however, frighten the three good women : Doña Teresa, through pure humanity ; Augustias, through a certain noble feeling of duty which induced her to tend and tame this heroic and eccentric personage ; and the servant, through instinctive terror of blood, mutilation, and possible death.

The Captain observed the anxiety of his nurses, and, abandoning the quiet and calm way in which he was undergoing the operation, exclaimed, furiously, to Doctor Sanchez :

"Fellow ! why did not you tell me all that privately ? If you are a clever doctor, that is no reason why you should not have a good heart. I say this, because you see what long and sad faces you've caused these ladies to have." Here the patient was obliged to stop, being overcome by the terrible pain occasioned by the doctor setting the broken bone.

"Bah !" he soon added. "It seems that I am to stop here just because there is nothing that excites me so much as women's tears."

The Captain was again silent, and bit his lips for a few moments, but did not utter a single groan. Unquestionably he was in great agony.

"For the rest, Señora," he continued, addressing Doña Teresa, "it seems to me that there is no reason why you should regard me with such odium, for my Uncle Alvaro will be here directly to deliver you from Captain Spitfire. Then the Señor Doctor will see—hang it, man, don't press so tightly !—that, in spite of what he says about my being in an unfit state to be moved—confound you, what a rough hand you've got !—four soldiers will carry me on a litter to my house

which will put an end to these nunnery-like scenes. Really all this is the height of absurdity! Broths for me! A chicken diet! Lay sand in the street on my account! Am I, by chance, a drawing-room soldier that I must be treated with such ridiculous tenderness?"

Dofia Teresa was about to reply, when, fortunately, there was a knock at the door, and Rosa announced the Marquis de los Tomillaros.

"Thank heaven!" they all exclaimed at the same time, although with different meanings.

The arrival of the Marquis coincided with the conclusion of the operation. Don Jorge was perspiring from pain, and Augustias gave him a little vinegar and water, whereupon he breathed more easily, and thanked her.

The Marquis at this moment reached the bedside, accompanied by the widow.

VIII.

DON ALVARO DE CORDOBA Y ALVAREZ DE TOLEDO was a very distinguished man, clean-shaven, and already shaven at that early hour; he was about sixty years of age, with a full, pacific, and amiable-looking countenance, indicative of the calmness and benignity of his heart, and so neat, symmetrical, and elegant in his dress, that he seemed to be the personification of method and order. Although he was really much concerned at the accident that had befallen his relative, he exhibited no signs of discomposure, and did not fail a single jot in the most scrupulous courtesy. He bowed very politely to Augustias, the doctor, and even slightly to the Galician, although Señora Barbastro had not introduced her to him; and then, and not till then, he cast a long, paternal, austere,

and affectionate glance towards the Captain, as if he were admonishing and sympathising with him at the same time.

In the meanwhile Doña Teresa, and above all the loquacious Rosa, who was careful to address her mistress repeatedly by the disputed titles, informed the ceremonious Marquis of all that had occurred in the house and in the immediate neighbourhood, from the previous afternoon when the first shot was fired until that very moment, without omitting to mention Don Jorge's repugnance to being waited upon and consoled with by those who had saved his life.

As soon as the widow and the Galician had ceased speaking, the Marquis interrogated Doctor Sanchez, who informed him of the nature of the Captain's wounds, and insisted upon his not being removed to any other place, under pain of compromising the cure, and possibly risking the patient's life.

Ultimately Don Alvaro turned towards Augustias with a questioning mien, as if enquiring whether she wished to add anything to the account given by the others; and seeing that the young lady had confined herself to making a slight negative bow, his Excellency took those nasal and laryngeal precautions proper to an orator about to address the Senate (the Marquis, it should be stated, was a Senator), and said seriously, yet affably :

"Gentlemen! In the midst of the tribulation which afflicts us, and avoiding political considerations concerning the sad events of yesterday, it seems to me that we may complain--"

"Don't you complain; you are not hurt! But when will it be my turn to speak?" interrupted the choleric Captain.

"Never, my dear Jorge," replied the Marquis, suavely. "I know you too well for it to be necessary for you to explain to me your positive or negative acts. The account given by these ladies is sufficient for me."

The Captain, in whom one had already observed the profound respect, or possible contempt, with which he systematically refrained from contradicting his illustrious uncle, philosophically folded his arms, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and began to hum a patriotic air.

"I was saying," continued the Marquis, "that good has followed upon evil. The fresh misfortune brought upon himself by my incorrigible and much-beloved relative, Don Jorge de Cordoba, whom no one ordered to engage in yesterday's conflict (for he is on half-pay, and he had already received many warnings to keep aloof from acts of chivalry) is a matter to be—or rather, which has been—easily remedied, thanks to the heroism of this brave Señorita, the charitable sentiments of the Countess de Santurce, the skill of the worthy doctor in medicine and surgery, Señor Sanchez, whose fame has been familiar to me for many years, and the zeal of this diligent domestic—"

Here the Galician burst into tears.

"But let us now pass on to the dispositive part," continued the Marquis, in whom the organ of classification and demarcation evidently predominated. "Ladies and gentlemen: Assuming that, in the judgment of science, which in this case is consonant with common sense, it would be very dangerous to remove our interesting patient and my nephew, Don Jorge de Cordoba, from this hospitable bed, I resign myself to his continuing to incommode this peaceful household until he is able to be transferred to his house or mine. And, oh, dear nephew, let your generous heart and the illustrious name you bear induce you to abandon certain college, barrack, and club-house habits, which might cause offence or anxiety to this honourable lady and this worthy damsel, who, efficaciously seconded by their active and robust domestic, saved you from dying in the middle of the street.

Do not reply. You know that I always think much over matters before I state my plans, and that I never abandon my decision. For the rest, the Countess and I will have some private talk regarding certain insignificant details of procedure, which shall give a natural and admissible form to what will always be at bottom an act of great charity on her part. And as, by means of this short discourse, for which I did not come prepared, I have explained the different aspects and phases of the question, I now refrain from further observations. I have done."

The Captain continued humming his tune with his angry eyes fixed so steadily on the ceiling and shining so brightly, that we scarcely know how it was that the ceiling escaped catching fire.

Augustias and her mother, seeing the enemy thus routed, had tried two or three times to arrest his attention in order to calm and console him, but he replied only by rapid and peevish gestures, very much like threats of vengeance, and returning immediately to his patriotic music with a still more lively and ardent expression.

It might be said that he was a lunatic in the presence of his keeper, the Marquis.

IX.

DOCTOR SANCHEZ having retired, the Marquis again solicited a few minutes' private conversation with the widow.

Doña Teresa conducted him to her cabinet, situated at the opposite end of the room, and as soon as the two were seated the man of the world commenced by asking for some water tempered with a little sugar, alleging that it always fatigued him to speak twice consecutively, since the three days' dis-

course he had delivered in the Senate against railroads and telegraphs ; but his real object in asking for water was to give time to the widow to explain who the General and Count was, of whom the good nobleman had never heard until that day—information of the greatest importance, inasmuch as the subject of money was about to be discussed.

The reader can easily imagine with what pleasure the poor lady explained her case at the first hint from Don Alvaro. She related the history of her legal proceedings from beginning to end, without forgetting to recite all the words contained in Article 10 of the Convention of Vergara, which she had learnt by heart ; and when at last there remained nothing more for her to say, and she began to fan herself in sign of truce, the Marquis seized the opportunity, cleared his throat, and spoke as follows :

“ You have the ill-luck, Countess, to harbour in your dwelling one of the most intractable and irreconcilable men God ever cast upon the earth. I will not say that he appears to me to be quite a demon, but one must be an angel, or love and pity him as I do, to put up with his impertinences, outbursts, and follies. It is sufficient for you to know that the dissipated and by no means timid people with whom he associates in clubs and cafés are in the habit of calling him ‘ Captain Spitfire,’ seeing that he becomes very angry and is ready to break anybody’s skull on the slightest provocation. I am bound, however, to observe, for your personal tranquillity and that of your family, that he is a man of honour and delicacy, and is not only incapable of offending the modesty of any lady, but is excessively diffident and shy when in the society of the fair sex. I will say more : in spite of his perpetual irascibility, he has done no real harm to anybody but himself ; and as for your humble seryant, you will have seen that he treats me with the respect and affection

due to a kind of elder brother or second father. But, notwithstanding this, I repeat it is impossible to live with him, as is proved by the eloquent fact that he being a bachelor, and I a widower, and neither of us having any other relative or presumptive heirs, he does not inhabit my very roomy house, which of course the silly fellow could do if he so desired, for I must inform you that by nature and education I am very patient, tolerant, and complaisant with persons who respect my tastes, hours, habits, ideas, and affections.

“This very mildness of disposition on my part is, to all appearance, that which makes us disagree in family life, as has been proved by divers experiments, for he is exasperated by polite and courteous forms, tender and affectionate scenes, and everything that is not harsh, rough, strong, and warlike. This was perhaps to be expected. He was brought up without a mother, and even without a nurse. His mother died in bringing him into the world, and his father, not wishing to be troubled with wet nurses, bought a goat—a wild one as it happened—and so suckled him. The moment the services of the goat were dispensed with the boy was sent away to boarding school, for his father, my poor brother Roderick, committed suicide a short time after he became a widower. He had not yet any hair on his chin when he went to fight savages in America, whence he returned to Spain to figure in our seven years’ civil war. He would now be a general if he had not always quarrelled with his superiors from the moment he put on his cadet’s epaulettes; the few promotions and appointments which he has obtained up to the present time have cost him prodigies of valour, and I do not know how many wounds, as without these he would never have been recommended for rewards by his chiefs, who were always his enemies on account of the bitter truths he was accustomed to address to them. He has been seventeen times under arrest,

and four times a prisoner in different fortresses, and all for insubordination. He has never apologised for anything he has done ! During peace he has always been unemployed, for if, in my periods of political favour, I succeeded in obtaining for him a place in a military establishment or elsewhere, he was invariably sent back home within twenty four hours. He has called out two Ministers of War, and he would have been shot long ago but for my name and his indisputable valour.

“ Notwithstanding his horrible conduct, and seeing that he had gambled away his little fortune at the wicked Casino del Principe, and that his half-pay was not sufficient to live upon consistently with his social position. I, about six years ago, had the risky idea of appointing him steward of my household and estates, thrown into confusion by the successive deaths of the three last owners (my father and my brothers, Alphonse and Henry) and much deteriorated and embarrassed in consequence of those frequent proprietary changes. It was Providence, no doubt, that inspired me with such a daring thought ! From that day order and prosperity marked my affairs ; old and unfaithful administrators lost their posts or were suddenly converted into saints ; and in the following year my revenues were doubled, in fact, almost quadrupled, owing to the reforms introduced by Don Jorge. With regard to cattle breeding, I am able to say that I now possess the best sheep in Aragon. And to perform these miracles, he has only to pay an occasional visit on horseback to my estates (carrying his sword in his hand like a stick) and to occupy himself about an hour a day with the account books. He receives a salary of thirty thousand reals, and I do not give him more, because on the last day of every month he loses at cards whatever remains after paying for his food and clothes, which are his only necessities of life. I do not speak of his

half-pay, because that is always attached for the payment of some fine he has incurred for disrespect to the authorities.

“To conclude: in spite of all I love and pity him, as I should a naughty child. Not having any children of my own, though I have been thrice married, and as by the law my noble title will devolve on my nephew, I think of bequeathing him all my wealth; of which intention the foolish fellow has not the slightest idea, and, I hope, never will have: for if he knew it, he would relinquish his post, or try to ruin me, so that no one should think him personally interested in my fortune. He believes, no doubt—his belief being founded on appearances and false rumours—that I contemplate leaving my property to a certain niece of my third wife’s, and I have allowed him to remain under this false impression, for the before-mentioned reasons. Fancy, then, his disappointment on the day when he inherits my nine millions! What a noise he would make with them in the world! I feel positive that within three months he would either be President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of War, or else be shot by order of General Narvaez, who holds those posts at the present time. My greatest pleasure would have been to see him married, to try if matrimony could tame and soften him; but Jorge is incapable of falling in love, and he would not confess it if he did, nor would any woman be able to live with such a hedgehog. Such is our famous Captain, impartially drawn; wherefore I pray you to have patience to endure him for a few weeks, relying that I shall not fail to acknowledge what you do for his health and life, as if it were done for myself.”

On terminating this part of his oration, the Marquis pulled out and unfolded his pocket-handkerchief, and placed it across his forehead, although he was not perspiring. Then he refolded it symmetrically, put it back in his coat pocket,

drank a few drops of water, and, changing his attitude and tone, continued :

"Let us now speak of certain details, unbecoming, to a certain extent, to persons in our position, but the discussion of which is inevitable. Fatality, Countess, has brought to this house a stranger, an unknown, Don Jorge de Cordoba, and will prevent him leaving it for six or seven weeks. You never before heard of this man, but he has a relative, a millionaire—and you are not rich, as you have just informed me."

"I am !" interrupted the widow, boldly.

"You are not ! and it is to your honour, seeing that your magnanimous husband ruined himself by defending the noblest cause—yes, Señora, I also am something of a Carlist."

"If you were Don Carlos himself, I would refuse what you were about to offer. Let us speak of something else, or close this conversation. I will never accept a stranger's money for fulfilling the duties of a Christian !"

"But, Señora, you are not a physician, or an apothecary, or——"

"My purse will provide all that your nephew needs. On the numerous occasions when my husband fell wounded, defending Don Carlos, excepting the last—when no one came to help him and he bled to death in the middle of a wood—he was succoured by some peasants of Navarre and Aragon, who would accept no recompense or present. I will act the same by Don Jorge de Cordoba, whatever his family of millionaires may wish."

"Nevertheless, Countess, I cannot permit this," observed the Marquis, partly pleased, partly annoyed.

"What you will never be able to deprive me of is the great honour which heaven conferred upon me yesterday. My deceased husband once related to me that when a mer-

chant vessel or a man-of-war discovers a shipwrecked man in the solitude of the sea, and saves him from death, that man is received on board with royal honours, although he be but a humble mariner. The crew man the yards, a rich carpet is laid over the starboard ladder, and the band and drums play the Royal Spanish March. Do you know why? Because in that shipwrecked man the crew see a creature sent by Providence! I will do the same by your nephew. I will put all my poor fortune as a carpet at his feet, and I would put millions if I had them!"

"Madam," exclaimed the Marquis, visibly weeping, "let me kiss your hand."

"And allow me, dear mamma, to proudly embrace you," added Augustias, who had heard all the conversation from the other side of the door.

Doña Teresa also began to weep on finding herself so applauded and esteemed. And as the Galician, observing the others crying, did not wish to lose the opportunity to shed tears without knowing why, there was so much snivelling, and such a shoal of benedictions, that we had better proceed to the next chapter, for fear our readers may also go off weeping, leaving us with no one whom we can continue to relate this poor story to.

X.

"JORGE," said the Marquis to the Captain, returning to the bedside of the patient, with the air of one about to take his departure, "I am going to leave you. The Countess will not consent to our paying even the physician and apothecary, so you will be here as in the house of your own mother, if she were alive. I will not say anything to you of the obli-

gation you are under to behave towards these ladies with amiability and good-breeding—in accordance with your high-minded sentiments, of which I have no doubts, and with the examples of urbanity and courtesy that I have given you—for it is the least you can and ought to do out of complaisance to persons so good principled and charitable. In the afternoon I will return here, if the Countess will grant me permission to do so, and I will send you ~~some~~ clean linen, some documents that urgently require your signature, and some cigarettes. Tell me if you want anything else, either from your house or mine.”

“As you are so good,” replied the Captain, “bring me a little cotton wool and a pair of blue spectacles.”

“Why?”

“The cotton wool to stuff in my ears, so that I may not hear idle words, and the blue spectacles that no one may read in my eyes the atrocious things I think.”

“Go to the devil!” replied the Marquis, unable to preserve his gravity. It was the same with Doña Teresa and Augustias, both of whom could not refrain from laughing.

Thereupon the nobleman took leave, addressing the most expressive and affectionate phrases to the ladies, just as if he had known and been on visiting terms with them for a long time.

“An excellent man!” exclaimed the widow, glancing in a sidelong fashion at the Captain.

“A very nice gentleman indeed!” said the Galician, examining a gold coin which the Marquis had given her.

“A humbug!” exclaimed the wounded man, addressing the silent Augustias. “He is just like what the ladies would wish all men to be. Ah! traitor! How seraphic! Compliment-monger! You magpie! You nun’s lap-dog! I will not die before I’ve paid you out for the trick you’ve

played me to-day, leaving me in the power of my enemies. As soon as I am recovered I will leave him and his office, and apply for the governorship of a prison, so as to live among people who will not irritate me with boasts of honour and sensibility. Here, Señorita Augustias, will you kindly tell me why you are laughing at me? Have I a monkey's face?"

"Why, I was laughing on thinking how ugly you would look in blue spectacles."

"Better and better! In that case you will be delivered from the danger of falling in love with me," replied the Captain, furiously.

Augustias burst out laughing, Doña Teresa turned pale, and the Galician broke forth, speaking with the velocity of ten words to a second:

"My young mistress is not used to falling in love with anyone. Since I've had this place she has refused an apothecary in the Calle Mayor, who keeps his carriage, and the lawyer who is conducting the Señora's action, and he is a millionaire, though scarcely older than you, and three or four others."

"Hold your tongue," said the mother, in a melancholy tone. "Do you not know that the Captain's expressions are mere flowers of speech. Happily, his uncle has explained to me all that was important to know in regard to the humours of our very amiable guest. I am glad, then, to see him in such a good temper; and would that my feeling of fatigue permitted me to joke also."

The Captain looked a little embarrassed, as if he were meditating some excuse or satisfaction to offer to the mother and daughter. But he only said, with the voice and countenance of an angry child coming to reason,

"Augustias, when this wretched leg does not pain me

quite so much we will have a game at cards together. Will that suit you?"

"It will indeed be a signal honour for me," replied the young lady, giving him his medicine.

Don Jorge looked at her, and smiled amicably for the first time in his life.

In conversations and disputes of this kind a fortnight or three weeks passed away, and the Captain was progressing favourably. Only a small scar remained on his forehead, and the leg bone was knitting itself together.

"This man's flesh is like a dog's," the member of the faculty was in the habit of saying.

"Thanks, old sawbones," replied the Captain, in a tone of affectionate frankness.

Doña Teresa and her guest were also beginning to feel much affection for one another, although they were always quarrelling. Don Jorge daily expressed an opinion that she would be unsuccessful in her legal proceedings, which occasioned the widow much uneasiness; but immediately afterwards he invited her to sit down at his bedside, and told her that during the civil war he had often heard of the partisan Barbastro, although not with the title of General or Count, as one of the most valiant and distinguished of Carlist chiefs, possessed of most humane and noble sentiments. But when he saw her sad and taciturn, he was careful not to joke with her about the law-suit, and called her by her title, which at once pleased and cheered her; or he sung to her some of the popular songs of Aragon, in which province he was born, melodies that recalled to her her courtship by the deceased Carlist, and excited her enthusiasm, making her weep and laugh at the same time.

This amiability on the part of the Captain, and especially the Aragonese songs, were the mother's exclusive privilege.

for as soon as Augustias approached the alcove in which the Captain's bed was situated, they ceased completely, and the invalid put on the face of a Turk. He seemed to have a deadly hatred for the beautiful damsel, perhaps for the reason that he never succeeded in inducing her to dispute with him, or saw her out of temper, or take seriously the atrocious things he was always uttering, or abandon her air of somewhat ~~haughty~~ ^{battering} serenity, which the invalid called constant insult. It was observed, however, that when Augustias was late in coming to say, "Good morning," the wicked Don Jorge asked a hundred times, in his terrible way :

"And where is she? Doña Nausea? That lazy young woman? Is her ladyship still asleep? Why did she permit you to get up so early, and why has she not brought me my chocolate? Perhaps she is ill, the young Princess de Santuree?"

These were his words when he addressed the mother; but he was more furious when he spoke to the servant.

"Hearken and obey, you monstrous Galician. Tell your insufferable young mistress that it is eight o'clock and I am hungry. Tell her she need not come dressed up so primly and elegantly—say I detest her in every possible way, and with all my five senses. And, finally, that if she does not come soon, I will not play cards with her."

This game of cards was a comedy, and almost a daily drama. The Captain played better than Augustias, but she had more luck, and the game generally concluded by the spoilt child of forty throwing the cards up to the ceiling or on to the floor; for he could not endure the gracious calmness with which the young lady always spoke to him.

XI.

THINGS were at this point when one beautiful spring morning Don Jorge and his charming enemy exchanged grave words upon the question whether the window of the alcove in which the bed was situated should be opened or not.

The Captain.—"You will drive me mad, never contradicting me, or being annoyed when I talk nonsense. You despise me. If you were a man, I'm sure we should come to blows."

Augustine.—"If I were a man I should laugh at all your humours the same as I do being a woman; and yet we should be very good friends."

The Captain.—"Friends—you and I? Impossible! You have the confounded gift of overwhelming and exasperating me with your prudence. I should never be a friend of yours, but your slave; and in order not to be so, I should propose, if you were only a man, that we should fight till death, like enemies as we are. Since, however, as you are a girl——"

Augustine.—"Go on, pray. Do not be sparing of your gallantries."

The Captain.—"Yes, Señorita, I will speak to you with all frankness. I have always had an instinctive aversion to women, the natural enemies of the power and dignity of men, as proved by Eve, Armida, that other creature who cut off Samson's hair, and many others cited by my uncle. But if there is anything that terrifies me more than a woman, it is a young lady, and above all one of those innocent and professedly sensible young ladies with dove's eyes and rosy lips, the form of a serpent of Paradise, and the face of an enchanting siren, with lily-white hands that conceal the claws of a tiger, and crocodile's tears, capable of deceiving and ruining all the saints of heaven. So my constant plan is to flee from such

folks as you. For, tell me, what weapons has a man like me to use against a tyrant of twenty summers, whose strength consists in her own weakness. Is it decorously possible to strike a woman? By no means. In this case, then, what course is open to him when he knows that a certain pretty and neat, but silly girl dominates and rules him?"

Augustus.—"Do as I do when you condescend to say these atrocious things to me. Listen to them and smile. For you must have observed I am not of a tearful temper, which renders your saying about crocodile's tears perfectly superfluous, so far as it was intended to apply to a person like me."

The Captain.—"You know how to wound, I see. That reply of yours must have been prompted by Lucifer. Smile! Laugh at me, you mean. That is what you are continually doing. When you pierced me with that new poniard, I said to myself that of all the damsels I ever feared meeting on this earth you were the most terrible, the most odious, to a man of my temper. I never feel so angry as when you smile at my outbursts. It seems to me as if you doubted my courage, the sincerity of my feelings, the energy of my character."

Augustus.—"Then now hearken to me, and believe that I am speaking the truth. I have known many men; some have asked me in marriage, but I've not been in love with any yet. But if, in the course of time, I were to become enamoured of a man, the object of my adoration would be some wild Indian like you. You have a spirit that would just suit mine."

The Captain.—"Oh, confound you! Here, Countess, call your daughter away, and tell her not to make my blood boil! Really, we had better not play at cards any more. I know I am not equal to you. Some nights I am unable to sleep,

thinking of our altercations, the hard things you oblige me to say to you, the irritating banter with which you reply, and the impossibility of our living in peace, in spite of my being so complaisant to the household. You would have done me better service if you had let me die in the middle of the street. It is very sad to dislike, or not to be able to bear with the person who has saved one's life by exposing her own. Fortunately, I shall soon be able to use my leg, and I will go to my little room in the Calle de Tudescos, my seraphic relative's office, and my favourite club, and so end this martyrdom, to which you have condemned me by your angelic face, form, and acts, your demoniacal coldness, banter, and laughter. We shall see one another only for a few days longer. I will arrange some way of keeping up your mamma's acquaintance by seeing her occasionally at my uncle's, or by correspondence, or appointing to meet her alone at some church or other. But as for you, I will never come near you until I hear you are married. What do I say? Then, less than ever. In short, leave me in peace, or put corrosive sublimate into my chocolate to-morrow."

The day on which Don Jorge uttered these words, Augustias did not smile, but looked grave and sad.

The Captain observed it, and hurriedly smothered his face under the quilt, murmuring to himself:

"I was wrong to say I would play no more. But I cannot recall my words; it would be a dishonour to me. What does it matter? Swallow the bitter dose, Captain. Men ought to be men."

Augustias, who had already left the alcove, was unaware of the sadness and repentance that were expressed under the bedclothes.

XII.

ANOTHER fortnight passed away without anything particular happening, and the day at length arrived when our hero was permitted to leave his bed, although with peremptory orders not to move off his chair, and to keep his bad leg extended on another. Knowing this, the Marquis, who had not failed any single morning to visit Don Jorge, or rather his adorable nurses, with whom he got on better than with his rough and impetuous nephew, sent the latter a magnificent invalid chair, which he had had expressly made for the occasion. This luxurious article of furniture was a masterpiece, invented and supervised by the aristocrat himself; it was furnished with large wheels, which facilitated the invalid's passage from one place to another, and with numerous springs, by means of which it could be transformed into a camp bedstead or a reclining chair, with a support on which the injured leg might be extended. There were also a little table, a desk, a looking-glass, and other conveniences, all admirably arranged.

The Marquis sent the ladies some beautiful flowers, as was his daily practice, accompanying them on this extraordinary occasion with a basket of confectionery and a dozen bottles of champagne---the latter to celebrate the improvement in their guest's health. He, moreover, gave a magnificent watch to the doctor and twenty-five duros to the servant; and a most happy day was passed, although the estimable widow seemed to be getting weaker in health.

The three women disputed as to who should have the supreme happiness of promenading the choleric Captain in his new chair; they drank champagne and ate sweets, in which proceeding even the representative of medicine joined. The Marquis made a long speech in favour of the institution

of matrimony, and Don Jorge himself deigned to laugh twice or thrice, making a butt of his most patient uncle, and afterwards sang in public—that is, in Augustias's presence—a few couplets of an Aragonese song.

The truth is that since the celebrated discussion on the fair sex, the Captain had somewhat changed, if not in style or manners, at least in temper—and who knows but in ideas and sentiments? It was evident that potticoats inspired him with less terror than previously, and they had all observed that the confidence and kindness which the widow received from him were now extended to Augustias. He certainly continued to call her his mortal enemy, more from Aragonese obstinacy than anything else, and to speak to her with apparent acrimony, in a loud tone, as if he were giving the word of command; but his eyes followed her about and were fixed on her with respect, and if by chance they fell on the young lady's pale face, more grave and sad from that day, they seemed anxious to enquire the cause of her melancholy. On her part, Augustias ceased to provoke the Captain, and no longer smiled when she saw him getting angry. She waited on him in silence, and silently endured his expressions of displeasure, more or less bitter and sincere, until at last he too became grave and sad, and asked her with the *nuireté* of a good child:

“What is the matter? Are you offended with me? Are you beginning to pay me back the hatred of which I have so often spoken to you?”

“Let us leave off such follies, Captain. We have indulged in too much nonsense already.”

“Then you are going to withdraw from the contest.”

“Withdraw?”

“You know what I mean. Do you not recollect the day you called me a wild Indian?”

"And I do not repent of it. But enough of such absurdities, and good-bye till to-morrow."

"Are you going? That's not the word. You are fleeing."

"As you like," replied Augustias, shrugging her shoulders. "But in any case I certainly am about to retire."

"And what am I to do here all the blessed night? Do you not see it is only seven o'clock?"

"I can't help that. You can pray, or go to sleep, or talk to mamma. I have to arrange my poor father's papers. Why not ask Rosa for a pack of cards and play 'patience' by yourself?"

"Tell me the truth," exclaimed the impenitent bachelor one day, devouring with his eyes his enemy's white and dimpled hands. "Do you owe me a grudge, because we have never played at cards since that morning?"

"Quite the contrary; I am very glad we have given up that folly," replied Augustias, hiding her hands in the pockets of her gown.

"Then whatever is it you want?"

"I want nothing, Señor Don Jorge."

"Why do you not call me Captain Spitfire?"

"Because I know you do not merit that name."

"Indeed! Now we are returning to suavities and eulogiums. How do you know what I am at the bottom?"

"I know you are a poor man with a very good heart, on which you have put a padlock and chain, I do not know whether from pride or from fear of your own sensibility. I admired you when I saw you fighting on the afternoon of the 26th of March, but I admired you much more when I heard you sing an Aragonese song, in spite of your pains, to divert and amuse my poor mother."

"That's it. Scoffing now at my bad voice!"

"Good gracious! What a man you are! I am not scoffing

at you. Neither do you deserve it. On the contrary, I have blessed you, and been on the point of weeping, every time I have heard you sing those verses."

"Tears! Worse and worse! Ah! Señorita, one has to be on his guard against you. You have made me say absurd things, unbecoming a man of strong character, only to laugh at me, and declare yourself avenged. Fortunately, I need no warning, and as soon as I find myself likely to fall into your nets, I will run off with my broken leg, and not stop until I reach Pekin. You are what is called a coquette."

"You are a wretched man."

"All the better for me."

"An unjust man, a savage, a fool."

"Go on! I like that. At last we shall have a quarrel."

"An unfortunate man!"

"By no means."

"Well, you need never thank me for what I've done for you. But, above all, do me the favour not to speak to me in this way again."

So spoke Augustias, and she turned her back on him, really annoyed.

The important point which these two beings had been unconsciously discussing from the day they first saw one another was still obscure and involved, but very shortly it was to appear clearer than water.

XIII.

THE happy and joyful day when the choleric Captain first rose from his bed of sickness was to have a rather lugubrious and lamentable conclusion, a very common thing in real life, as we philosophically remarked in a former chapter.

It was getting dusk. The doctor and the Marquis had left, and Augustias and Rosa had gone to pray at church, when the Captain, who was again in bed, heard the street-bell ring, and Doña Teresa open the window and ask, "Who is it?"—and then opening the door say, "How could I imagine you would come at this time? Come this way." A man's voice was then heard replying, "I am very sorry, Señora."

The two withdrew to one of the inner rooms, and the rest of the conversation was lost in the distance, all remaining quiet for a few minutes, when steps were again heard, and the same man's voice saying, as if taking leave, "I am very happy to hear you are better," to which Doña Teresa replied, "You need not trouble yourself": after which the door was again opened and closed, and profound silence reigned in the house.

The Captain divined that something disagreeable had occurred, and he even hoped that the widow would come and apprise him of it, but as she did not do so, he inferred that the matter was a domestic secret, and abstained from calling to her, although he thought he heard her sighing in the hall.

There was another knock at the door, and Doña Teresa opened it instantly, which proved that she had not moved a step since the visitor departed; and then Augustias was heard to say:

"Why were you waiting for us with the latch in your hand, mamma? What is the matter? Why are you weeping? Why don't you reply? Are you ill, dear mother? Rosa, go and fetch Doctor Sanchez. Poor mamma is dying. Help me to carry her to the sofa. Don't you see she is fainting. Poor dear mamma! What is the matter with you that you cannot walk?"

Don Jorge then saw Doña Teresa brought into the sitting-

room supported on the arms of her daughter and servant, her head drooping on her chest. Augustias, on remembering the presence of the Captain, uttered a loud cry, and said to him.

"Whatever have you done to my mother?"

"No, no! he knows nothing," the invalid hastened to say in a kind tone. "I turned ill all on a sudden. It will go off."

The Captain became red with indignation. "You hear what your mamma say;" he remarked at last, bitterly. "You have calumniated me! No; it is I who have calumniated myself ever since I have been here. I feel I deserve the injustice you do me. Doña Teresa, don't mind that ungrateful creature, and tell me that you are quite well, or I will break loose from here, where I am bound by pain and crucified by my enemy."

In the meanwhile the widow was placed on the sofa, and Rosa crossed the street in search of a doctor.

"I hope you will pardon me, Captain," said Augustias. "Consider it is my mother, and that I found her dying, and away from you—although it was at your side that I left her a quarter of an hour ago. Has anyone been during my absence?"

The Captain was about to answer in the affirmative, when Doña Teresa hastily replied:

"No; no one. It is true, is it not, Señor Don Jorge? I am afraid it is my nerves. I am getting old. It is nothing more than that, and I am now quite well, dear."

Doctor Sanchez arrived, and after feeling the pulse of the widow whom he had left so happy half an hour before, and in apparently a good state of health, said she must go to bed at once, and keep her room for some time, until, in fact, the serious nervous disorder she was suffering from

should cease. Then he explained privately to Augustias and Don Jorge that the widow's heart was affected, of which he had complete evidence when he felt her pulse on the afternoon of the 26th of March; and that such affections, although they were not easy to cure, might be kept under for a long time by dint of repose, comfort, cheerfulness, good diet, and I don't know how many other luxuries—the principal base of which is—money.

"The 26th of March!" exclaimed the Captain. This means that I am the guilty cause of all that has occurred."

"I am the cause of all this," said Augustias, as if speaking to herself.

"Do not trouble yourselves about the cause of the causes," said the doctor, sadly. "To be guilty, there must be a bad intention; and you are both incapable of having wished to harm Doña Teresa."

The pardoned couple looked at one another with an expression of anxiety, and then both said at the same moment:

"We must save her!"

This was the first step towards coming to an understanding.

XIV.

As soon as the doctor left, it was decided, after a long discussion, to place the widow's bed in a recess that there was in a corner of the drawing-room opposite the alcove occupied by Don Jorge.

"By this means," said the prudent Augustias, "the two invalids will be able to see and talk to one another, and it will be easy for Rosa or me to wait upon them both from the drawing-room."

On that night it was Augustias's turn to sit up, and nothing particular occurred. Doña Teresa felt much easier towards daylight, and slept for about an hour. The doctor on calling found her much relieved, and as she seemed still to improve, Augustias, yielding to her mother's tender supplications and the Captain's imperious commands, retired to her room the next night at two o'clock, and Rosa remained as nurse, seated in the same chair, and in the same posture and snoring as loudly as when she attended Don Jorge on the night he was wounded.

It was about half-past three in the morning when our captious hero heard Doña Teresa breathing very laboriously, and calling him in a low and choking voice.

"Are you calling me?" asked Don Jorge, dissimulating his anxiety.

"Yes, Captain," replied the invalid. "Awake Rosa carefully, so that my daughter shall not hear. I can't raise my voice higher."

"But what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Very ill, and I want to speak to you alone before dying. Get Rosa to put you in the large chair, and wheel you here. But be careful not to awake my poor Augustias."

The Captain punctiliously did what Doña Teresa had told him, and in a few instants was at her side. The poor widow was in a high fever, and was almost suffocated through the difficulty of breathing. On her livid face was impressed the indelible stamp of approaching death. The Captain was terrified for the first time in his life.

"Leave us, Rosa; but do not wake my daughter. God will let me live until the morning, and then I will bid her good-bye. Listen, Captain; I am dying."

"Why do you say that?" replied Don Jorge, pressing the invalid's burning hand. "This is only a nervous

attack like yesterday's. And, besides, I don't want you to die."

"But I am dying, Captain. I know it. It were useless to call the doctor. It is a confessor I want now. But that would frighten my poor daughter; so we will wait till we have finished speaking. I want to speak to you without witnesses."

"Well, we are alone now. If you were to ask me to spill every drop of the poor blood with which I entered your house, and all the rich blood which I have acquired in it, I would do so with pleasure."

"I know it, I know it, my dear friend. You are very honourable and love us. But, Captain, you must know all. Yesterday afternoon my solicitor came, and said my application for a pension as a general's widow was refused."

"The deuce! And for this trifle you are making yourself ill. The government have refused my applications a hundred times."

"I am neither a Countess, nor the widow of a general," continued the widow. "You were quite right when you refused to address me by those titles."

"Better and better. And I am neither a general nor a Marquis, yet my grandfather was both. So we are equal."

"Yes, but I am also completely ruined. My family lost all the property they possessed in supporting the cause of Don Carlos. Up to now, I have been living on the proceeds of my jewels, and a week ago I sold the last, a beautiful pearl necklace. It pains me to speak to you of these matters."

"Speak, Señora, speak. I have been in pecuniary difficulties also. If you only knew what straits I have been in through the money I have lost at cards."

"But for my loss there is no remedy. All my means of livelihood and my daughter's future depended on the result

of my petition. If it had been granted, she would have succeeded to the pension on my death. Now, the poor dear has neither future nor present, and not even sufficient money to bury me. For the lawyer, whose pride was wounded at being refused by my daughter, sent me his bill of costs last night at the same time as he forwarded the unhappy intelligence, being no doubt desirous of augmenting our misfortune, in order to bend the will of Augustias and oblige her to marry him. The solicitor also brought me his account and behaved very cruelly to me, speaking of insolvency and of issuing an execution, and I know not what else, that I was quite beside myself and handed him all that remained of the proceeds of the estate—in other words, my last penny, my last piece of bread. Consequently, Augustias is now as poor as those unhappy creatures who beg from door to door. And she does not know it, but is sleeping tranquilly at this moment. How, then, can I help dying? The wonder is that I did not die last night.”

“But you are not going to die for such a small matter as this,” replied the Captain, in a deadly state of perspiration. “You have done quite right to speak to me, Señora. I will sacrifice myself to petticoats. When I am recovered, instead of going to my own house, I will have all my things brought here, my arms and my dogs, and we will live together till the end of time.”

“Together!” replied the widow, mournfully. “But did you not hear me say I am dying? Do you not see it? Do you think I should have spoken to you of my troubles, had I not been certain that within a few hours I should be dead?”

“Then, Señora, what is it you want with me?” asked the horrified Don Jorge. “You would not, I know, go through the fatigue you are now undergoing in order to confer on me the honour and pleasure of asking my uncle for that poor

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metal—money; for you must feel certain that, esteeming you both as we do, and you knowing us as I believe you do, money will never fail you while either of us live. Therefore, there is some other thing you wish me to do; and I beg of you, before saying another word, to think of the solemnity of the occasion, and not to hesitate in making your request.”

“I do not understand what you mean; nor do I know that I have anything to ask of you,” replied Doña Teresa, with the sincerity of a saint. “But put yourself in my place. I am a mother and adore my daughter. I am about to leave her alone in the world. I do not see at my side at the hour of death, nor have I on the face of the earth, any friend to whose care I can commend her, excepting you, who, in the midst of all, show your kindness. Still I do not see in what way you can be of service to her. Money of itself is something cold, repugnant, almost horrible. Yet it were more horrible still for my poor Augustias to be obliged to gain her living with her needle, or to go out to nurse, or to beg for alms. You will excuse me then, Captain, when, feeling the approach of death, I called you to say good-bye to you, and now with clasped hands and weeping for the last time, I say to you on the brink of the grave—Captain, be a guardian, a father, a brother, to my poor orphan. Protect her! aid her! Do not let her die of hunger or despair. Do not let her be alone in the world. Imagine that to-day a daughter is born to you.”

“By the grace of God!” exclaimed Don Jorge, striking an arm of his chair, “I will do all that you ask for Augustias and much more. But I’ve just had a cruel time of it; I thought you were going to ask me to marry the girl.”

“Señor Don Jorge de Cordoba, no mother would ask that, nor would Augustias tolerate my disposing of her noble and valorous heart,” said Doña Teresa with such dignity

that the Captain was almost petrified with fear. The poor man ultimately recovered himself, and said, with the humility of an affectionate son, and kissing the dying woman's hands ;

"Pardon me, Señora. I am a lunatic, a monster, an ill-bred fellow, who does not know how to express himself. It has never been my wish to offend either you or Augustias. All that I loyally desire to tell you is that if I were to marry your beautiful daughter, who is a perfect model of virtue, I should inevitably make her life unhappy. I was not born for love, or to be loved, nor to live in company with a wife, nor to have children, nor for anything sweet, tender, or affectionate. I am as independent as a savage, or a wild animal, and the yoke of matrimony would humiliate me, would render me desperate. Besides, Augustias does not love me, nor do I merit her love ; and it is really not worth while speaking of the matter. Yet do me the favour to believe, by this first tear I have shed since I was a man, and by these kisses, that whatever I am able to effect in this world, as well as all my solicitude, shall be for Augustias, whom I esteem and like and love, and to whom I owe my life and perhaps my future salvation. I swear it by this sacred medallion which my mother always wore round her neck. I swear it by——, but you do not hear me ; you do not reply ; you do not look at me. Señora, are you worse ? Oh, my God, she is dying, and I am powerless to move. Rosa ! Rosa ! water ! vinegar ! a confessor ! a crucifix ! and I will commend her soul to Heaven as best I can. Ah ! here is my medallion. Most holy Virgin, receive in thy sainted bosom my second mother ! For I am now a new man. Poor Augustias ! poor me ! This is what hunting down rebels has brought me to."

Doña Teresa was dead. She died just at the time she felt

the Captain's tears falling on her hands, which he was kissing, and a smile of supreme felicity rested on the half-opened lips of the corpse.

Augustias was awakened by the Captain's terrified cries, which were followed by doleful groans on the part of the servant. She partly dressed herself, and with a feeling of alarm ran to her mother's room. But she found the doorway blocked by Don Jorge's chair, and was prevented from entering by the Captain, who said, with outstretched arms and with his eyes almost starting from their sockets,

"Do not go in, Augustias. Do not, or I shall get up, although it may kill me."

"My poor mother! my poor dear mother! Let me see my mother," cried the unhappy creature, struggling for entrance.

"Augustias, in God's name, do not enter the room now. We will soon go in together. Leave her who has suffered so much a little moment."

"My mother is dead!" exclaimed Augustias, falling on her knees by the Captain's chair.

"My poor daughter! Weep with me as long as you like," replied Don Jorge, drawing the poor orphan's head towards his breast, and stroking her hair with his other hand. "Weep with him who never wept until to-day, and who weeps for thee and for her!"

Such emotion in a man like the Captain was so extraordinary, that Augustias, in the midst of her great grief, signified her appreciation and gratitude by placing her hand upon his heart.

And in this embrace these two beings, whom felicity would never have made friends, remained for some minutes.

XV.

AT eleven o'clock on a splendid morning in the month of flowers, a fortnight after Doña Teresa's funeral, our friend the Captain was pacing quickly up and down the principal room of the deceased's house, supported on two handsome crutches of ebony and silver, a present from the Marquis: and, although the convalescent was there alone, and no one was in either the cabinet or the alcove, he spoke from time to time half aloud in his usual vehement tone:

"There is no remedy. It is only too evident. I am walking perfectly. And I think I should walk better without these confounded sticks. I could easily walk to my house."

Here he drew a long breath, as if sighing, and, changing his tone, murmured:

"Could! I said could! What use is it being able? Formerly, I used to think a man could do whatever he liked, but now I see he cannot even like what pleases him. Women again! Wisely have I feared them from my birth. But your precaution was useless, father, when you had me suckled by a goat. At the end of all these years, I have fallen into the hands of those assassins who caused you to kill yourself. But I will escape, though I leave my heart in their clutches!"

He then looked at his watch, sighed again, and said very quietly:

"A quarter past eleven, and I have not yet seen her, although I have been up since six. What a happy time that was when she brought me my chocolate and we played cards together. Now, whenever I call, the Galician comes. May that 'worthy domestic,' as my fool of an uncle calls her, be

damned. It will soon be noon, and I shall be told luncheon is ready. I shall then go to the dining room, where I shall find a statue in mourning, who neither speaks, nor laughs, nor weeps, nor eats, nor drinks, nor knows of anything taking place, nor of what her mother related to me on that night. The proud being thinks she is in her own house, and has no other anxiety than to see me get well, and be off, so that my company shall not lower her in people's opinion. Unhappy creature! How can I tell her the truth? How can I say that her mother did not hand me any money, that whatever has been spent here during the last fortnight has come out of my pocket? I will die before I tell her that. But how to continue thus indefinitely without rendering her true or feigned accounts?"

Don Jorge was still occupied with these thoughts when a knock was heard at the door, followed by Augustias, saying, "May I come in?"

"Of course," cried the delighted Captain, running to open the door, and forgetting all his fears and reflections. "It was quite time you came to pay me a visit as of old. Shall we have a game at cards? But what is the matter? Why do you look at me thus?"

"Let us sit down and talk together, Captain," observed Augustias, gravely, her charming face, pale as wax, expressing the deepest emotion.

Don Jorge twisted his moustache, as he always did when a quarrel was brewing, and sat down on the edge of a chair, looking on every side with the uneasy air of a criminal.

The young lady took a seat near him, reflected for a few moments, as if she were collecting her strength for the approaching storm, and then said, in a tone of exquisite sweetness:

"Señor de Cordoba, the morning on which my dear

mother died, and when, yielding to your entreaties, I retired to my room, and you, after performing the last sad duties, remained watching beside her with a piety and veneration which I shall never forget—" Here sobs checked her utterance.

"Come, come, Augustias, who is it says afraid? Show a bold front to the enemy. You are too brave to break down over such things," exclaimed the Captain.

"You know courage has never failed me until to-day," replied the girl, with a painful effort to resume her usual calmness: "but to-day it is not a question of the great loss which I shall always feel, and the sense of which I would not lose for anything in the world. It is a question of another kind of affliction which will necessitate some changes, and must be put an end to."

"God grant it," said the Captain, looking somewhat more gloomy.

"I was about to say," continued Augustias, "that on that morning you addressed me tenderly, making use of these words, 'My daughter.'"

"What? I called you 'My daughter?'"

"Let me continue, Señor Don Jorge. 'My daughter,' you exclaimed, with a voice that thrilled me to the heart, 'You have nothing to do now but weep and pray for your mother. I was present during her last moments. She informed me of her affairs, and handed me all the money she possessed, in order that I might pay for her funeral and other things as your guardian, which she appointed me to be, to save you from worry during the first days of your grief. When you are a little stronger and calmer, we will go into the accounts.'"

"What next?" interrupted the Captain, frowning severely, as if, by dint of appearing terrible, he thought he could change the aspect of affairs. "Have I not properly fulfilled

these duties? Have I committed any errors? Do you suspect me of embezzling your inheritance? Was it wrong to give your mamma a befitting funeral? Or perchance some talebearer has told you that I have had a large stone put over her grave with her titles inscribed thereon? Well, the stone is my own personal caprice, and I thought of asking you to let me pay for it out of my own pocket. I could not resist the temptation to confer on my noble friend the pleasure of bearing those titles among the dead which were denied her by the living."

"I knew nothing about the stone," broke forth Augustias, with pious gratitude, seizing and pressing Don Jorge's hand, in spite of his efforts to withdraw it. "May God reward you for it! I accept the present in my mother's name and my own. But in other things, and even in this, you have done wrong in deceiving me, and if I had known as much before I should have asked you for a settlement of accounts."

"And may I ask in what matters I have deceived you, my dear Señorita?" Don Jorge ventured to ask, not imagining that Augustias could possibly know anything about what Doña Teresa had spoken to him just before her death.

"You deceived me on that sad morning," replied the young lady, severely, "by telling me that my mother had handed to you I know not how much——"

"And on what ground does your ladyship give the lie to a Captain, who is an honourable man, and much your senior in age?" cried Don Jorge, with feigned vehemence, trying to pick a quarrel in order to escape from such a ticklish business.

"On these grounds," answered Augustias, calmly, "I have since acquired the certainty that my mother had no money whatever when she fell ill."

"No money, indeed! Such clever people as you think that

they know everything. Then you were not aware that Doña Teresa had just disposed of a very valuable piece of jewelry."

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. A pearl pecklace with a diamond clasp for which she received five hundred duros."

"Exactly. A necklace of pearls as large as nuts, and from which there still remains a considerable sum which I am now expending. Would you like me to hand this over to you now, and do you desire to take the charge of the administration of your estate yourself? Are you so dissatisfied with my guardianship?"

"How good you are, Captain, but at the same time how foolish. Read this letter which I have just received, and you will see where the five hundred duros went on the night that my poor mother was stricken to death."

The Captain turned as red as a poppy, but managed to exclaim, angrily:

"That is to say I am lying, and that you think a piece of paper is more worthy of credit than I am? The fact that throughout my career I have always shown the most scrupulous regard for truth avails me nothing?"

"It avails you thus far, Señor Don Jorge, that I thank you all the more for having on my account acted contrary to your principles."

"Let us see what the letter says," said the Captain, in order to discover if there was anything in it which would get him out of his awkward position. "Perhaps it is a hoax."

The letter was from the deceased widow's advocate, and ran as follows:

"Señorita Doña Augustias Barbastro.

"My dear young lady and esteemed friend,—I have just received unofficially the sad news of your good mother's death; and sympathising with you in your legitimate grief,

I beg to be allowed to wish you all physical and moral strength to bear up under such an unexpected and awful blow inflicted by the Great Power that regulates human destinies. Having said this, which is no mere formal piece of courtesy, but the expression of the old and declared affection that my heart feels, I have now to perform another sacred duty.

"The solicitor of your deceased mother, on notifying to me to-day the painful news, stated, that when, a fortnight ago, he had to inform her of the unfavourable decision in regard to her petition, and, at the same time, present our bills of costs, he could not but perceive that the Señora possessed scarcely sufficient money to pay the latter; and he further stated that, in handing him the amount, she exhibited a certain angry hastiness, which was, I thought, a fresh indication of the bitter aversion you testified for me a short time ago.

"Now, my dear Augustias, I am much tormented by the idea that you are enduring privations in consequence of the exaggerated promptitude with which your mamma discharged my account; and I beg your consent to my returning you the money, augmented by whatever else you may require, and that I possess. It is not my fault if my person is unattractive and that I have no other claims but those of a sincere but unappreciated affection, which I offer to you and beg you to accept from

"Your enamoured friend,

"TADEO JACINTO DE PAJARES."

"I will cut the advocate's throat," exclaimed Don Jorge, raising the letter over his head. "The wretch, the Jew, the scoundrel! He murdered your good mother by alarming her about insolvency and threatening execution; and now he is trying to purchase your hand with the money

he extorted from her. This shall never be ! Take these crutches ! Rosa, my hat. Go to my house, and ask them to give it you. No, stop, bring me my military cap, it is in the alcove here, and my sword. No, don't bring the sword. A crutch will do to break the scoundrel's head with."

"Go away, Rosa, and do not pay any attention. It is only the Captain's nonsense," said Augustias, tearing up the letter. "Captain, sit down and listen to me. I despise the Señor Advocate with all his badly-acquired wealth, and I have not replied to him, nor do I intend to do so. A coward and a miser, he thought to make me his by officially defending our weak case before the tribunals. Let us speak no more about the unworthy old fellow."

"Nor about anything else," added the artful Captain, seizing his crutches and beginning to walk quickly up and down the room, as if fleeing from further discussion.

"But, my friend," observed the young lady, with some feeling, "matters must not remain thus."

"Well, well, we will speak about that by and by. What interests me now, is luncheon ; for I feel as hungry as a wolf. How strong that knave of a doctor has made my leg ! I can jump about like a young fawn."

"Captain," exclaimed, Augustias, pettishly, "I will not move from this chair till you have heard me, and the matter that brought me here is decided."

"What matter ? What are you dinning into my ears ? Ah ! talking of din, I swear never again to sing that Aragonese song. How your poor mother used to laugh when she heard me sing it."

"Señor de Cordoba," insisted Augustias, with great emphasis, "I once more beg you to pay some attention to a matter which compromises my honour and dignity."

"Oh, I shall never think them compromised," exclaimed

Don Jorge, flourishing one crutch like a fencing foil. "In my eyes you are the most honourable and worthy woman God ever created."

"It is not enough to be so in your opinion; everybody must think the same as you say you do. Now sit down and listen to me, or I will send for your uncle who, as a conscientious man, will soon put an end to the shameful position in which I am placed."

"I tell you I will not sit down. I have had enough of beds and easy chairs. However, you may talk as long as you like."

"I have but little to say to you," replied Augustias, resuming her grave manner, "and that little must have occurred to you from the first moment, Señor de Cordoba; for the past fortnight you have been maintaining this household; you have paid for my mother's funeral, for the mourning, and for the very bread I have eaten. I cannot now return you what has been expended, but I will pay you in time. But know that from this hour—"

"Pay me! Thunder and lightning! She says she will pay me!" cried the Captain, in a tone of mingled grief and anger, raising his crutches aloft as he spoke. "This woman is determined to kill me; and to enable her to do so, she wants me to hear her. But I will not hear her. The conference is over. Rosa! Luncheon! Señorita, I will await you in the dining room. Do me the favour to come as quickly as possible."

"You have a nice way of respecting my mother's memory. How well you fulfil the duties towards her poor orphan, which she imposed upon you! What an interest you take in my honour and repose!" exclaimed Augustias, with such dignity, that Don Jorge suddenly stopped, like a horse checked by the rein, looked at her for a moment, threw his crutches

from him, again sat down in the easy chair, and said, folding his arms :

“Speak on until the end of time.”

“I was saying,” continued Augustias, as soon as she was again calm, “that from this day, the absurd situation created by your imprudent generosity must cease. You are now well, and can go to your own house.”

“A fine arrangement, indeed!” interrupted Don Jorge, who immediately placed his hand over his mouth, as if he repented of the interruption.

“The only one possible,” exclaimed Augustias.

“And what will you do then?” cried the Captain. “Live on air like a chameleon?”

“What do you suppose? I shall sell the furniture and other things in the house.”

“Which are four rooms worth about four cuartos,” again interrupted Don Jorge, throwing a contemptuous glance over the apartment, which, however, was fairly well furnished.

“They are worth what they are worth,” replied the orphan, meekly. “But at any rate, I do not mean to live at the expense of your pocket, or on your uncle’s charity.”

“You are quite wrong as to my uncle. He has paid nothing,” roared the Captain, “and his assistance will never be necessary while I am in the world. It is true that poor Alvaro—I do not wish to deny his merit—when he heard of the fatal occurrence made certain offers, far higher ones than I should have imagined; but I replied that the daughter of the Countess de Santurce could receive favours (or rather confer them, by the mere act of acceptance) only from her guardian, Don Jorge de Cordoba, in whose care the deceased had left her. The man listened to reason, and then obliged me to ask for a loan, nothing more, just a few pounds, on

account of the salary he pays me. So you may be easy on that score."

"But it is the same thing," stammered the young lady, "whether I have to pay the one or the other, when——"

"When what? That is the whole question. What do you mean by when?"

"What a man you are! When, by hard work, and the assistance of a merciful Providence, I have made my way in the world."

"Way in the world!" shouted the Captain. "Come, Señorita, do not talk such nonsense. You work! Work with such pretty hands, which I was never tired of looking at when we played at cards. And what use am I in the world if the daughter of Doña Teresa Carrillo, my only friend, has to work with her needle, or a flat-iron, to earn a morsel of bread?"

"Very good. But leave all this to me and to time," exclaimed Augustias, casting down her eyes. "But at any rate, you will do me the favour to leave this very day, will you not?"

"Why? Why should I go away when I am very comfortable here?"

"Because you are now quite well. You can walk about the street the same as you walk about the room, and it does not look well for us to be living together."

"Well, then, suppose that this is a boarding-house. Yes, that will settle everything. Let me be your boarder, and there will be no necessity to sell the furniture or anything else. The two salaries I receive will be ample to enable us to live very well, provided I am never fined for disrespect to the War Office, and never lose anything at cards unless it be my temper when you beat me too often. Is this agreed?"

"Don't talk nonsense," said she, sadly. "You did not enter this house as a boarder, and no one would believe you were

here in that capacity ; nor do I wish for such an arrangement. I am neither old enough nor experienced enough for a boarding-house keeper ; I prefer the business of a dressmaker."

"And I would prefer to hang myself !" cried the Captain.

"I know, Captain, that you are very kind and compassionate, and I thank you with all my heart for all the painful feelings you are enduring in consequence of my declining your offer of assistance. But such is life—such is the world—such the laws of society."

"What have I to do with society ?"

"But I have much to do with it. For one reason, because its laws are a reflection of God's law."

"Then is it God's law that I should not maintain anybody I care for ?"

"It is from the mere fact that society is divided into families."

"I have no family, and consequently can dispose of my money as I like."

"But I must not accept it. The daughter of a worthy man who bore the name of Barbastro, and a good woman who bore that of Carrillo, cannot live at the expense of anybody."

"Then in your eyes I am 'anybody.'"

"Yes, and one of the worst in reputation in regard to the present matter, seeing that you are a bachelor, still young, and not a saint."

"Look here, Señorita," exclaimed the Captain resolutely, after a brief pause, as though about to sum up and terminate an intricate argument ; "the night your mother died, I said to her honourably, and with my habitual frankness, so that the good lady should not die under a false impression, that Captain Spitfire was ready to undergo anything in this world, except to keep a wife and children. Do you want me to speak clearer than that ?"

And you can relate this to me?" replied Augustias, with equal dignity and grace. "Do you think I am indirectly begging for your hand?"

"No, *Señorita*," Don Jorge hastened to reply, reddening up to the roots of his hair. "I know you too well to suspect you of such trickery. Besides, we have already seen that you despise even millionaire lovers—like the advocate. Doña Teresa herself gave me the same kind of reply, when I revealed to her my unshakeable determination never to get married. But the reason I have said this to you, is that you may not think ill of a man, who, esteeming you as I esteem you, and liking you as I like you—for I like you very much more than you imagine)—yet does not ask you to marry him."

"The request might not be granted," replied the young lady, coldly. "It would be necessary that I should like the man."

"Is that it?" roared the Captain, jumping upon his feet. "You mean to say you do not like me?"

"How came you to infer such a probability?" replied Augustias, calmly.

"Never mind probabilities!" thundered the poor disciple of Mars. "I understand what is said to me. If I cannot marry you, or live in your company in any other way, I must not and will not abandon you to your sad fate. Let us, then, effect a compromise; and as you do not consent to our living together as brother and sister, since the world smirches everything with its evil thoughts, allow me to pay you an annual pension, as kings and rich men do to persons worthy of protection and aid."

"But, *Señor Don Jorge*, you are neither a king nor rich."

"True. But, at any rate, you are a queen in my eyes,

and I ought and I wish to pay you the voluntary tribute which good subjects pay to exiled princes."

"Enough of kings and queens, Captain," said Augustias, with the sadness of despair. "I shall always remember you with pleasure as a good friend of old: but now let us say adieu, and leave me at least dignity in my misfortune."

"That is very likely! And, in the meanwhile, I am to bathe in rose water tormented with the thought that the woman who saved my life, by exposing her own, is in misery. I shall have the satisfaction of thinking that the only daughter of Eve who ever pleased me, whom I ever liked, whom I adore with all my soul, is in want of bare necessities, working for her daily bread, living in a garret, without help or counsel from me!"

"Señor Captain," interrupted Augustias, solemnly, "men, who are not able to marry, and have the courage to admit and proclaim it, ought not to speak of adoring honourable young women. So send for a cab, and we will say farewell; and you shall hear of me again when fortune treats me more kindly."

"What a woman this is!" shouted the Captain, covering his face with his hands. "I feared all this from the very first. On this account I left off playing cards with her. For this I passed so many sleepless nights. Was there ever such a situation as mine? How can I leave her unprotected and alone, when I love her more than my life. And how can I marry her after declaiming so much against matrimony? What would they say of me at the club? How could I face my friends in the street, if I had a woman on my arm, or at home with a baby on my knee? Children, indeed! To hear them cry, to fear they might fall ill, and die—believe me, I was not born for such things, Augustias. I should become so desperate, that you would pray aloud for a divorce or to

become a widow. Take my advice, Augustias. Don't marry me, even if I ask you."

"Really," broke forth the young woman, sitting down on her chair, with astonishing calmness; "I do not know why you think I desire to marry you. I may prefer to remain single, even if I have to work day and night, like many other orphans."

"Why do I think so?" replied the Captain, with great frankness. "From the natural aspect of the matter, because we both love one another; because we cannot do without one another; because there is no other way in which we can live together. Do you not think I have known this for a long time? That I have not thought of it, that your honour and your good name are not indifferent to me? I have spoken as I have in order to flee from my own convictions, to see if I could escape from the terrible dilemma that robs me of sleep, and find some means of not marrying you, and so avoid the impending catastrophe. But there is no help for it, and I must marry you in the end, if you remain single."

"Single!" repeated Augustias. "Who has told you that I may not, in the course of time, meet with a man to my taste, who will not have a horror of matrimony?"

"Augustias, do not speak of such a thing," cried the Captain, turning the colour of brimstone.

"Why?"

"Speak not of it, I say; and know, henceforth, that I will cut out the heart of the man who— But I do wrong to get angry without any reason. I am not such a fool as to ignore what has happened. Do you wish to know it? It is very simple. We love one another. And do not tell me I am mistaken, because that would be an untruth. And this is the proof. If you did not care for me, I should not care for you.

After having saved my life, you waited on me like a sister of charity ; you endured patiently all the brutal expressions, that for seven weeks I used towards you, in order to deliver myself from your seductive power ; you wept in my arms when your mother died ; you have been patient with me for the last hour ; in short, Augustias, let us make a treaty, let us split the difference. I ask for ten years' grace. When I am half a century old, infirm, and accustomed to the idea of slavery, we will get married, without anyone knowing it, and go to live out of Madrid, where nobody will be able to laugh at Captain Spitfire. But, in the meanwhile, accept, under the strictest secrecy, the half of my income. You will live here, and I at my own house. We shall see one another, always in the presence of others—at an evening reception, for example. We will correspond regularly and frequently. I will never enter this street, for fear of scandal ; and on All-Soul's day we will go to the cemetery together, with Rosa, to visit Doña Teresa's tomb."

Augustias could not help smiling on hearing this grand discourse of the Captain's, and it was not a mocking smile, but a joyous one like a wished-for gleam of hope, the first reflection of the star of happiness shining tardily. But a woman after all, although one of the most worthy and sincere, she knew how to repress her budding joy, and said with feigned diffidence, and at the same time with the rectitude of true modesty :

"The extravagant conditions you impose to the gift of an unsolicited marriage ring are very laughable. You are cruel to evade bestowing the alms which I am proud enough not to solicit, and which I would not accept for aught in the world. It concerns a girl who is neither ugly nor shameless that you should have been scolding her for an hour past as if she had asked you to make love to her. But do let us termi-

nate this disagreeable conversation, not, however, without my pardoning you, and again thanking you for your great, though badly expressed kindness. Shall I tell Rosa to go for a cab?"

"Not yet, not yet!" replied the Captain, rising with a very reflective air, as if he were seeking words to express some abstruse and delicate idea. "There is still one remedy in the way of compromise, and please to understand it is the last. But before I mention its nature, you must answer me loyally one question—after you have first handed me my crutches, so that I may be able to go away without saying another word, should you refuse my proposal."

"Ask your question and make your proposal," said Augustias, giving him his crutches with exquisite grace.

Don Jorge supported, or rather raised, himself upon them, and, looking at the young woman with a stern and searching air, said in a loud magisterial voice:

"Do you like me? Is my personal appearance acceptable, setting aside these crutches, which I shall never get rid of? Have we any basis upon which to treat? Would you marry me at once if I decided to ask for your hand, under the condition which I shall mention directly?"

Augustias knew that this was the critical moment, but she rose up immediately, and said with her wonted courage:

"Señor Don Jorge, that question is unworthy of you, and no gentleman would ask it of one whom he considered a lady. We have had quite enough nonsense. Rosa! Rosa! Señor de Cordoba calls you."

And thus speaking, the high-minded young lady walked towards the door, after making a stiff curtsy to the Captain. The latter, thanks to his crutches, overtook her in the middle of the room, and exclaimed with unwonted humility:

"Do not go away, for the memory of her who is looking

down upon us from above. I agree to your not answering my question, and I will at once propose the compromise. It was written that I should only do what you please. But you be off, Rosa ; we do not want you here."

Augustias stopped, turned her head, and with a most seductive, but serene and imperious air, fixed her eyes upon the Captain's. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful.

"Augustias," stammered the hero of a hundred battles, "on one certain, immutable, and cardinal condition, I have the honour to ask for your hand ; and if you agree to it, we will get married on the earliest day possible, for I am quite unable to live without you."

The young lady acknowledged this act of true heroism on the part of Don Jorge by a tender and delicious smile.

"But I repeat that it is under one condition," the poor man hastened to add, feeling that Augustias's smile and look were rapidly subduing him.

"On what condition?" asked the young woman, with charming calmness, turning round, and fascinating him with the rays of light from her brilliant black eyes.

"On condition," stuttered out the Captain, "that if we have any children we send them to the Foundling Hospital. On that point I will never yield. Are you agreed? Say yes, for mercy's sake."

"But is my acceptance of that condition necessary?" replied Augustias, with a burst of laughter. "You can take them there yourself. What am I saying? We will take them together, and hand them over without a kiss. Jorge, do you think we shall take them?"

While Augustias was thus speaking she looked at Don Jorge de Cordoba with the rapture of an angel.

The poor Captain was almost dead with joy; a stream of

tears flowed from his eyes, and he exclaimed, pressing the dear orphan in his arms,

"Then I am a lost man!"

"Completely lost, Señor Captain Spitfire," replied Augustias. "So now let us go to luncheon; then we will have a game at cards, and in the afternoon, when the Marquis comes, we will ask him to give me away at the wedding, a duty which the good gentleman has in my opinion desired ever since the first time he saw us together."

XVI.

ONE morning in the month of May, 1852—that is to say, four years after the occurrences we have just related—a certain friend of ours pulled up his horse at the door of an old and spacious mansion in the Avenue de San Francisco at Madrid, threw the bridle to the groom attending him, and said to the powdered footman who opened the door:

"Is Don Jorge de Cordoba within?"

"I presume you mean his lordship the Marquis de los Tomillares," replied the servant.

"What do you say? Is my dear Jorge a marquis? Is the good Don Alvaro dead, then? You need not be astonished at my being unaware of the fact, as I only arrived in Madrid last night, after eighteen months' absence."

"The Marquis Don Alvaro," said the servant, solemnly, uncovering his head, "died about eight months ago, leaving as his sole heir his nephew and former controller of his household, Don Jorge de Cordoba, the present Marquis de los Tomillares."

"Good. Now do me the favour to let him know that his friend T——is here."

"You will find him in the library. His lordship does not like visitors to be announced, but to enter when they please."

"Fortunately," said the gentleman to himself, as he ascended the staircase, "I know the house well. In the library, eh! Fancy Captain Spitfire setting up as a book-worm!"

After passing through several apartments, and encountering various servants, all of whom said that their master was in the library, the visitor at length arrived at the door, opened it, and stood stupefied at beholding the oddest group which he had ever cast eyes upon.

In the centre of the room, was a man on his hands and knees, with a child about three years old mounted on his back, digging his heels in the man's ribs, while another child, whose age appeared to be about eighteen months, stood in front of the kneeling individual's rumpled head, tugging at his cravat as if it were a halter, and crying out, in the lisping voice of childhood, "Gee up, Dobbin!"

THE UNLUCKY TREASURE.

I.

THE once renowned, but now little heard of town of Aldeire forms part of the Marquisate del Cenet, and is half suspended, half buried in a fissure of the central mass of the Sierra Nevada, some five or six thousand feet above the level of the sea, and six or seven thousand below the eternal snows of the peak of Mulhacem.

Aldeire, with all due deference to its cura be it said, is a Moorish town. That it has been one is clearly proved by its name, its situation and its construction. That it is not yet wholly Christian, although a part of Spain, and having its little Catholic church and its brotherhood of the Virgin, of Jesus, and of not a few saints, is shewn by the character and customs of its inhabitants, the terrible, but ephemeral rages that unite or separate them in continual squabbles, and the sad black eyes, pale complexions, and taciturnity in speech and laughter of men, women and children.

For it will be as well to recall to mind, that the Moriscos of the Marquisate del Cenet were not wholly expelled from Spain like those of Alpujarras, but that many remained hidden and overlooked, thanks to the prudence or cowardice with which they refused to hearken to the rash and heroic call to arms of their unfortunate prince, Aben-Humeya.

From whence I infer that Juan Gomez, nicknamed Hormiga, constitutional Mayor of Aldeire, in the year of grace, 1821, may very well have been the grandson of some Mustapha, or Mohammed, or other.

The said Juan Gomez, then upwards of fifty years of age, was a cunning, though entirely illiterate rustic, covetous and hard-working, as was proved not only by his nickname Hormiga, signifying an ant, but also by his farm, acquired either by good or evil arts, and comprising some of the best land in the district. He held a lease of the town-lands, and, thanks to a present of some fowls, past laying, made by him to the town clerk, had obtained amongst these, almost for nothing, a barren plot situate close to the town, in the midst of which rose the ruins of an ancient fort or watch tower, known as the Moor's Tower.

It is needless to say that Tio Hormiga never for one moment reflected as to whom the said Moor might have been, or as to the original object of the ruined building. All that he saw was that with so many fallen stones, and with those which he could loosen, he could build a fine strong enclosure for his flocks. Consequently, as a suitable and economical amusement, he at once began to devote his evenings to pulling down with his own hands what remained of the old Moorish structure.

"You will knock yourself up," said his wife, on his returning at night, covered with dust and perspiration, and with an iron bar hidden beneath his cloak.

"Not at all," he replied, "such exercise keeps me from becoming like our sons the students, whom the pond-keeper told me he saw in the theatre at Grenada the other night with faces so yellow that it made one sick to look at them."

"Poor fellows, they study so hard. But you ought to be

ashamed of toiling like a labourer—you, the richest man in the place, and Mayor as well."

"That is why I work by myself."

"You ought to have some help, though. It will take you a century to pull the tower down, and even that may not be time enough."

"Don't talk nonsense. When it comes to building the enclosure I will have workmen and perhaps a master builder. But I know all about pulling things down, and it is very amusing to destroy anything."

"You say so because you are a man. Destruction of any kind frightens and pains me."

"Old women's nonsense. If you only knew how many things want pulling down in this world."

"Be quiet. It was a bad day when they made you Mayor. You will see that when the Royalists get back into power the King will have you executed."

"We shall see."

II.

ONE evening Tio Horniga returned from his task earlier than usual and looking very preoccupied.

His wife waited until the farm hands were out of the way before asking him what was the matter, and he answered by shewing her a leaden tube with a lid at one end. From this he drew out, and carefully unrolled, a yellowish parchment covered with strange characters, and said with imposing solemnity:

"I cannot even read Spanish, which is the plainest language in the world, but the devil fly away with me if this is not Moorish writing."

"That is to say you found it in the tower?"

"Not only on account of that, but because these pot-hooks are quite different from any I ever saw made by a Christian."

His wife looked at and smelt the parchment, and exclaimed with comic certainty:

"It is Moorish."

After a short interval she continued in a melancholy tone:

"Although I cannot understand it I would swear that it is the discharge of some soldier of Mahomet who is now in hell."

"You say that because of the leaden case such as our soldiers now use."

"Just so."

"Then you are wrong, Torcuata, for, as our boy Augustin has often told me, the Moors had neither recruits nor discharges. It is," and here Tio Horniga lowered his voice and said in a tone of conviction, "the indication of a hidden treasure."

"You are right," suddenly exclaimed his wife, inspired by the same belief. "Have you found it? Is it much? Have you hidden it carefully? Are they silver or gold coins? Do you think they can all be passed without difficulty? What luck for our lads! How they will enjoy themselves at Grenada and Madrid. I should like to see the treasure. Let us go at once; there is a moon to-night."

"Good heavens! woman; how do you think I could have found the treasure by this indication when I cannot read either Moorish or Christian letters?"

"That's true. Well, look here. There is only one thing to be done. As soon as it is daylight saddle a good mule, cross the Sierra by the pass of the Puerto de la Ragua and go to Ugijar, to the house of your old crony, Don Matias

Quesada, who, as you know, understands everything. He will explain this paper, and give you good advice as usual."

"All his advice costs me money, although we were cronies. But I had thought of that plan myself. I will go to Ugijar to-morrow and will be back here by nightfall, if I press my beast a little."

"But take care that you explain everything to him."

"There is not much to explain. The tube was hidden in a niche formed in the thickness of a wall, and lined with blue tiles. I pulled down all that side of the building and found nothing else of note. Below the part I have demolished is solid masonry with stones measuring at least a yard every way, cemented together and not to be easily moved by one man, nor even by two as strong as I am. Consequently, it is necessary to know exactly where the treasure is hidden, under pain of having to wrench apart all the masonry of the tower with the help of the neighbours."

"No, no. Go to Ugijar as soon as it is light. Offer your old crony a share, not a very large one, of what we may find, and when we know where to set to work I myself will help you to pull out the hewn stones. My dear children! Anything for them! As to myself, I only feel that if there should be any wrong in this matter. . . ."

"What wrong can there be, you goose?"

"I cannot quite explain what I mean; but treasures have always seemed to me to be connected with the Evil One and with phantoms. Besides you have got this land on lease for such a low rent. All the people will say there was some trick in the business."

"That concerns the town-clerk and the municipality. They drew up the deeds."

"Besides I have heard that a part of every treasure found has to be given up to the King."

"That is when it is not found on private property, and this is mine."

"Private property! Whom did the tower, which the corporation have let to you, belong to?"

"To some Moor."

"But what Moor? Surely, Juan, the money which that Moor hid in the tower is his or his heirs? Not yours or mine."

"You are talking nonsense. If it were so, we ought to send every year to Africa to the descendants of the Moors the revenue yielded by the fields of Grenada, Guadix, and hundreds of other towns."

"You may be right. At any rate go to Ugijar, and your old crony will advise you for the best in everything."

III.

UGIJAR is distant from Aldeire about four leagues of very bad road. Nevertheless, it was barely nine o'clock on the following morning when Juan Gomez, dressed in his holiday clothes, found himself in the office of Don Matias de Quesada, an old but vigorous man, doctor of civil and canon law, and author of most of the quibbles against justice in that part of the country. He had all his life been a pettifogging lawyer, and was very well to do, and had good connections in Grenada and Madrid.

He heard the story of his worthy friend, and after having carefully examined the parchment, said that in his opinion it had nothing to do with a treasure; that the niche in which the tube was found must have been a cupboard, and that the document appeared to him a kind of prayer, such as all the Moors read on Friday mornings. Nevertheless, the Arabic

tongue not being thoroughly known to him he would despatch the document to Madrid to a fellow schoolmate of his, who was now employed in connection with the mission to the Holy Land, in order that he might send it on to Jerusalem, where it could be translated into Spanish. For this it would be as well to send on to his friend a couple of gold onzas as a refresher to buy a cup of chocolate with.

Tio Juan Gomez hesitated a little at this price for a cup of chocolate, as representing something like twelve thousand and odd reales per pound for that commodity, but he had such faith in the treasure, that he pulled out from the folds of his sash eight four-duro pieces and handed them to the advocate, who weighed them one by one before putting them in his pocket. Then Tio Hormiga set forth on his return to Aldeire, determined to go on excavating beneath the Moor's Tower, whilst the parchment was on its way to and from the Holy Land, which, according to his adviser, would take about a year and a half.

IV.

No sooner had Juan Gomez turned his back than his friend and counsellor seized a pen and wrote the following letter, addressed to Don Bonifacio Tudela y Gonzalez, organist of the Catholic Cathedral of Ceuta.

"My dear nephew,—Only to a man of your religious feelings would I trust the important secret contained in the enclosed document. I say this because it unquestionably contains the particulars respecting a treasure of which I will give you a share if I manage to discover it by your help. But it is needful that you should find a Moor to translate

the parchment, and that you should send me the translation in a registered letter, without a word to anyone about the matter, unless to your wife, whom I know to be a person of discretion.

"Pardon me for not having written to you for so many years, but you know my manifold occupations. Your aunt continues to pray for you every night. • I trust the stomach complaint from which you suffered in 1806 is better, and remain, your affectionate uncle,

"MATIAS DE QUESADA.

"Ugijar, January 15, 1821.

"P.S. — Remembrances to Papa, and let me know if you have any children."

Having written this letter, the worthy limb of the law went into the kitchen, where his wife was knitting stockings and watching the cooking of the puchero, or stew, and made the following remarks in a stern and harsh tone, after having thrown into her lap the eight four-duro pieces already spoken of.

"Encarnacion, buy as much corn as you can with this, The price will go up in the next few months, and see that it is properly ground. Get breakfast ready whilst I go and post this letter for Seville, asking what barley is selling at. Let the eggs be well fried and the chocolate smooth."

The lawyer's wife did not answer a word, but went on knitting like an automaton.

V.

A FORTNIGHT later, on a beautiful January day, such as is only known in the north of Africa and the south of Europe, the organist of the cathedral of Ceuta was taking the air on

the flat roof of his two-storied house, with the ease and satisfaction of a man who had discharged his duties at high mass, and had since consumed a pound of anchovies, another of meat, and another of bread, with a corresponding quantity of the wine of Tarifa.

The worthy musician, as fat as a bullock and as red as a beetroot, was laboriously digesting this repast, and gazing with an apoplectic look at the magnificent panorama presented by the blue Mediterranean, the gray waters of the Straits of Gibraltar, the accursed rock that lends its name to them, the neighbouring heights of Anghera and Benzu, and the snowy peaks of the Lesser Atlas, when he heard hurried steps on the stairs, and the silvery tones of his wife exclaiming, joyously,

"Bonifacio! Bonifacio! A letter from Ugijar. A letter from your uncle. And such a heavy one."

"What!" exclaimed the organist, whirling round like a terrestrial globe upon that portion of his portly person that rested upon his seat, "What saint can have prompted my uncle to write to me? For fifteen years I have been living in this place and it is the first time that he has written to me, although I have sent him a hundred letters. He must want me to do something for him."

So saying he opened the letter—taking care that the Pepa of the postscript should not get a glimpse of it—and revealed the yellow parchment rustling, and as it were trying to unfold itself.

"What has he sent us?" asked his wife, a fair native of Cadiz, and still graceful despite her forty years of age.

"Pepita, do not be so inquisitive. I will tell you, if I ought to tell you, when I come down. I have told you a thousand times not to read my letters."

"A nice warning from a libertine like you. But be quick

and let me see if I can make out the other paper your uncle has sent you. It looks like a bank note from the other world."

Whilst his wife was chattering the musician read his letter, and was so amazed that he rose to his feet without an effort. He was, nevertheless, so accustomed to dissimulate, that he managed to say in a very natural manner :

"What nonsense. The old rascal must be trying on a joke. Would you believe that he has sent me this leaf from a Hebrew bible for me to find a Jew to buy it, the old fool fancying that it will fetch a good round sum ! At the same time," he added, in order to change the conversation, and putting the letter and the parchment into his pocket, "he asks if we have any children."

"He has none," exclaimed Pepita, quickly ; "he doubtless means us to be his heirs."

"It is more likely that the old miser has been thinking of inheriting from us. But it is eleven o'clock and I must go and get the organ in tune for vespers this evening. Take care that dinner is ready by one, and do not forget some good potatoes in the stew. Whether we have any children ! I feel ashamed to have to answer, 'no.'"

"It is not my fault," was the reply. "Who could have loved you more than I, who, despite your pot-belly, think you the handsomest man in the world ?"

"Handsomest, eh ? Well, look here, Pepa," observed the organist, thinking of the parchment, "if my uncle makes me his heir, or if I get rich in any other way, I swear to take you to live in the Plaza de San Antonio at Cadiz, and to buy you more jewelry than the Virgin of Sorrows at Grenada has. So good-bye, pet."

And chucking her under the chin, he seized his hat and took his way, not to the cathedral, but to the narrow lanes

inhabited by those Moorish families who were allowed to dwell within the fortification.

VI.

IN the narrowest of these lanes, at the door of a poor but freshly whitewashed cabin, a Moor of thirty-five or forty was squatting on his heels smoking a pipe of sun-baked clay. He was a dealer in the eggs and poultry brought to the gates of Ceuta by the independent natives of the Sierra Bullones and Sierra Bermeja, which eggs and poultry he retailed at the house-doors or in the market-place at a profit of cent. per cent. He was called by the Spaniards Manos-gordas, and by the Moroccanians, Admet-Ben-Carime-el-Abdoun.

As soon as the Moor saw the organist he rose and came to meet him with many salaams.

"I want you to translate this document into Spanish," said Don Bonifacio.

Manos-gordas took the document, and at the first glance murmured,

"It is Moorish."

"I think it is Arabic. But I want to know what it says, and if you do not deceive me I will give you a handsome present when the business I am confiding to your honesty is completed."

Meanwhile Admet-Ben-Carime had glanced through the parchment and turned very pale.

"Do you see that it is a question of a great treasure?" said the organist, in a tone half affirmative, half interrogative.

"I think so," stammered the Mahometan.

"Think so! Your very perturbation shows that it is so."

"Pardon me," replied Manos-gordas, bathed in perspira-

tion ; " there are words in modern Arabic, and I understand them, but there are also others in ancient Arabic which I cannot make out."

" What are the words you can read ?"

" I can make out something about gold, pearls, and the curse of Allah ; but I cannot follow the explanation. I must see the Dervish of Anghera, who is learned in all things, and will be able to translate the whole. Give me the parchment now, and I will bring it back to-morrow, and will neither deceive nor rob you. I swear it."

So saying he crossed his hands, raised them to his mouth and kissed them fervently.

Don Bonifacio reflected that in order to decipher the document it was necessary to trust to some Moor, and that there was no other so well known to or so well-disposed towards him as Manos-gordas, and so agreed to leave the manuscript with the latter, upon his repeating his oath that he would be back the following day from Anghera with the translation, swearing in return for his own part to give him at least a hundred duros when the treasure was discovered.

The Mussulman and the Christian took leave of one another, and the latter bent his steps not to his house nor to the cathedral, but to the office of a friend where he wrote the following letter :

" Señor Don Matias de Quesada and Sanchez Ugijar.

" My dear uncle,—I thank God at having received news of yourself and of Aunt Encarnacion, and that the news is as favourable as Josefa and myself could desire. We, dear uncle, although younger than yourselves, are very sickly and burthened by children who will soon become orphans and beg alms.

" Whoever told you that the parchment which you sent me contained the indication of a treasure was laughing at you.

I have had it translated by a very competent person and find it to be a string of blasphemies against our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Virgin and the Saints of Heaven, written in Arabic verses by a Morisco dog of the Marquisate del Cenet during the rebellion of Aben Humeya. In view of such a sacrilege, and by the advice of the Señor Penitentiary, I have burnt this impudent evidence of Mahometan perversity.

“Kind regards to my aunt, accept also those of Josefa, who is, for the tenth time, in an interesting condition, and send some pecuniary relief to your nephew, who is worn to skin and bone by his cursed stomach complaint.

“Ceuta, January 29, 1821.

BONIFACIO.”

VII.

WHILST the organist was writing and posting the above letter, Admet-Ben-Carime-el-Abdoun was making a not very bulky bundle of the whole of his belongings, consisting of three old haiks, two goatskin mantles, a mortar for pounding grain, an iron lamp, and a copper jar filled with pesetas* which he had just dug up from a corner of the yard belonging to his cabin. With this burden he loaded his single wife, uglier than sin and fouler than her husband's conscience, and left Ceuta, telling the officer on guard at the gate that they were going to Fez for change of air by the advice of a veterinary surgeon.

It may be opportune to mention that from that day forward nothing was ever seen or known of Manos-gordas in Ceuta or its environs, and that Don Bonifacio Tudela y Gonzalez did not have the pleasure of receiving the translation of the parchment from him either the following day or at any other period during his life.

Small copper coins.

Meanwhile Admet-Ben-Carime-el-Abdoun breathed freely, and even gave a skip or two, without, however, dropping his loose slippers from his feet, as soon as he found himself outside the formidable walls of the Spanish fortalice, and with all Africa before him.

"This way, Zama," he said to his weary spouse, as though addressing a mule.

And instead of turning westward in the direction of the wood of Anghera, in search of the learned Santon, as he had told Don Bonifacio, he made his way southwards by a ravine shaded by trees, which led him towards the road to Tetuan, or rather the faint and winding track that serves for one.

When Ben-Carime and Zama had gained the valley of Tarajar they halted for a short time on the bank of the little stream traversing it. In that remote solitude which appears as if fresh from the hands of the Creator and untouched by those of man, the woman proceeded to wash and comb herself whilst the Moer took out the manuscript and began to read it with the same emotion as on the former occasion.

It ran as follows :—

"The blessing of Allah be on the honest man who reads this.

"There is no other glory save that of Allah, of whom Mahomet was, and is, in the heart of true believers, the Prophet and Envoy.

"Those who rob the house of him who is away waging war or in exile, shall live under the curse of Allah and Mahomet, and die eaten up by vermin.

"Blessed be Allah, who created such to eat up evil men.

"I, the writer, am the Caid Hassan-Ben-Jussuf, a servant of Allah, although I have wrongly been called Don Rodrigo de Acuña by the successors of the Christian dogs, who, by

force, and in violation of solemn stipulations baptised with a broom in guise of a holy-water sprinkler, my unfortunate ancestors, and many other followers of Islam in these realms.

"I am a captain under the standard of him who, since the death of Aben Humeya, is the legitimate sovereign of Andalusia, Muley-Abdala-Mahamud-Aben-Aboo. That he is not now seated on the throne of Grenada is due to the treachery and cowardice with which the Moors of Valencia failed in their promises and oaths to rise at the same time as the Moors of Grenada against the common tyrant, but they will be repaid by Allah, and if we are vanquished will also be vanquished and thrust out of Spain, without the merit of having struggled till the last hour upon the field of honour and in defence of the right, whilst, if we are conquerors, we will cut off their heads and throw them to the pigs.

"I am, in short, the lord of this Tower, and of all the land around it westward to the Barranco del Zarro, and eastward to the Barranco de los Esparragos.

"Things are not going well. Since the bastard Don Juan of Austria, whom Allah confound, came to do battle against the True Believers I see that for the present we shall be routed, though in future years a prince of the blood of the Prophet may yet recover the throne of Grenada, which has been ours for seven hundred years. But, for the present, I repeat things are going badly, and I shall soon have to take refuge in Morocco with my forty-three sons, supposing that the Spaniards do not capture me in the next battle and hang me to a cork tree as I would hang them all if I could.

"Well, on quitting this tower for the last and decisive campaign, I shall leave hidden here, in a spot which no one can reach without first coming across this parchment, all my gold, all my silver, all my pearls, the treasure of my family, the

estate of my fathers, and of myself and my heirs, the property of which I am master by Divine and human laws, as the bird is of the feather that grows, or as the child is of the teeth that push their way with pain and trouble, or as any mortal may be of the cancer or leprosy inherited from his fathers.

“ Hold therefore you, be you Moor, Christian or Jew, who having set to work to demolish this my house have succeeded in discovering and reading the lines which I am writing. Stop and respect your neighbour's property. Do not lay your hand upon that which is his. Do not profit by his absence. Here there is nothing that has to do with the public domain or the State. The gold of the mines may belong to him who discovers it and a portion to the sovereign of the territory. But gold smelted and coined into money belongs to its master, and to no one but its master. Do not rob me therefore. Do not rob my descendants who will come on the day when it is written to recover their inheritance. If by chance you find my treasure I counsel you to make proclamation to the descendants of Hassan-Ben-Jussuf, for it is not honest to keep findings when these findings have known owners.

“ If you do not do this, may you be cursed with the curse of Allah and myself; may you be blasted by lightning; may each of my coins turn in your hands into a scorpion, and each pearl into a venomous insect; may your children die of leprosy with their fingers rotten and fallen away so that they may not even be able to scratch themselves for ease; may all the wives you love and pamper deceive you with your slaves; may your eldest daughter flee from your house with a Jew; may you be impaled upon a stake and held up on high to public shame until, by the weight of your body, the point comes out at the top of your head, and you are like a frog on a spit.

"Blessed be Allah who is Allah.

"Tower of Zoraya, in Aldeire, El Cenet, the fifteenth day of the month Saphar, in the year of the Hegira, 968.

"HASSAN-BEN-JUSSUF."

VIII.

MANOS-GORDAS remained deeply preoccupied after reading this document, not on account of the moral maxims and fearful maledictions contained in it, for owing to his intercourse with Christians and Jews at Tetuan and Ceuta the scoundrel had lost his faith in Allah and Mahomet, but from his belief that his face, his accent, and any other Mussulman signs about him would hinder his making his way in Spain, where he saw himself exposed to certain death as soon as any Christian discovered in him an enemy of the Holy Virgin.

Besides, what aid could the law and authorities of Spain give to a foreigner, a Mahometan, to acquire the Tower of Zoraya, make excavations, and take possession of the treasure without losing it at once, together with his life.

"There is no other way," ran his concluding reflections. "I must trust to the renegade, Ben-Munuza, he is a Spaniard, and his company would free me from all peril there. But as there is not a worse man under the canopy of heaven than this renegade, I must adopt some precautions."

In virtue of this reflection he took out writing materials, wrote a letter, addressed it, fastened it with a little bread chewed into a paste, and laughed diabolically. Then turning to his wife, who was still engaged in removing a year's dirt at the cost of the clearness of the stream, and summoning her by a whistle, he spoke as follows:

"Sit down and listen attentively to what I have to say to you."

The woman curled herself up like a cat, fixed on Manos-gordas the two carbuncles that served her for eyes, and replied :

"Speak, my lord, whom your servant only desires to obey."

Manos-gordas continued, "If, from this time forward, any accident should befall me, or if I disappear from the world without first taking leave of you, or if, having bid you farewell, you do not receive any news from me within six weeks, you must manage to get into Ceuta and to post this letter there. You understand?"

Zama burst into tears and exclaimed: "Admet, are you going to leave me?"

"Do not howl," replied the Moor, "who talks about leaving you. You know well enough that you please me and are useful to me. But the question at present is whether you thoroughly understand my commission."

The woman opened her dress and taking the letter placed it next to her heart.

"There," she said, "if any harm comes, this letter shall fall into the post at Ceuta, even if I have to follow it to the tomb."

Aben-Carime smiled.

IX.

THE wandering couple must have slept late, for it was not less than nine o'clock on the following morning when they reached Cabo Negro.

Here there is an Arab settlement, consisting of a few cabins, a morabite or hermitage, and a well with a stone rim and copper bucket. The settlement was entirely deserted at that

moment. All the inhabitants had sallied forth with their flocks or their implements of labour to the neighbouring hills and dales.

"Wait for me here," said Manos-gordas to his wife. "I am going in quest of Ben-Munuza, who must be somewhere on the other side of that hill, ploughing the wretched strip of ground he has there."

"Ben-Munuza," said Zama with alarm, "the renegade of whom you have spoken to me."

"Do not fear," interrupted Manos-gordas, "to-day I am more powerful than he is. Within a couple of hours I shall be back and you will see him follow me with the humility of a dog. This is his cabin. Wait for us in it and prepare a big dish of cooscoosoo with the maize and the butter you will find within. You know I like it well cooked. Ah! I was forgetting. If I am not back by nightfall set out, and if you do not find me on the other side of the hill, or if you find me a corpse, return to Ceuta and post the letter. Another point, if it is my body you find, search it so as to discover whether or not Ben-Munuza has robbed me of this parchment. If he has done so return from Ceuta to Tetuan and there denounce the robbery and murder to the authorities. That is all. Good-bye."

The woman remained in tears and Manos-gordas took the path leading to the summit of the nearest hill.

X.

ON crossing the hill he soon discovered in the adjoining valley a stoutly built Moor, clad wholly in white, engaged in ploughing the black earth in patriarchal fashion, with the aid of a pair of bullocks. This man appeared a marble statue

of peace, yet he was the gloomy and dreaded regenade, Ben-Munuza. He was about forty, strong, active and with a very lugubrious countenance, while his eyes were blue, and his hair as yellow as that African sun which had bronzed his face.

"Good-day, Manos-gordas," he cried in Spanish, as soon as he caught sight of the Moor, his voice expressing the melancholy joy of the exile who finds a chance of employing his native tongue.

"Good-day, Juan Falgueira," replied Ben-Carime, sarcastically.

The renegade trembled from head to foot on hearing this salutation, and plucked the iron bar from the plough as though to defend himself.

"What name did you utter?" he said, advancing towards Manos-gordas.

The latter looked at him smilingly and answered in Arabic, with a courage of which no one would have believed him capable.

"I uttered your real name, the name you bore in Spain when you were a Christian, and which I learned when I was in Oran three years ago."

"In Oran?"

"In Oran, yes. What is there strange in that? You came from there to Morocco, and when I went there to buy fowls, I asked about you, giving your description, and your story was told me by several Spaniards. I learned that you were a Galician, named Juan Falgueira, and that you had escaped from the jail at Grenada, where you lay under sentence of death for having robbed and murdered, fifteen years ago, some gentleman in whose employ you were as a muleteer. Have you now any doubt as to whether I know you?"

"Tell me," answered the renegade in a low voice, and glancing around him, "have you told this to any of the

Moors? Does anyone beside yourself know it in this accursed country. For I seek to live in peace without anyone or anything recalling to me that evil deed, of which perhaps I have purged myself. I am poor, I have no family, nor any longer a country, a native tongue, or a God. I live amongst foes without other possessions than these bullocks and this land, acquired by dint of ten years of toil. Consequently you did badly to come and tell me——”

“Wait!” exclaimed Manos-gordas, much alarmed. “Do not glare at me like a wolf, I come to do you a good turn, and not to offend you out of mere wantonness. I have told no one your story. Why? Because every secret is a treasure which he who tells it loses. There are, however, cases in which there may be very useful interchanges of secrets. For instance, I am going to tell you an important secret of my own, which will serve as an equivalent to the one I possess of yours, and bind us to be friends all our lives.”

“I understand. Go on,” calmly replied the renegade.

Ben-Carime then read the parchment while Juan Falgueira listened without moving an eyelash, and as though annoyed, seeing which, the Moor, in order to inspire him with confidence, revealed the fact that he himself had stolen this document from a Christian of Ceuta.

The Spaniard smiled slightly at the thought of the fear in which he must be held by the poultry dealer, since the latter told him of this robbery without there being any necessity for his doing so, and Manos-gordas, encouraged by this smile, at length came to the bottom of the business.

“I suppose you appreciate the importance of the document, and the reason why I have read it to you. I do not know where the Tower of Zoraya, or Aldeire, or Cenet is situated. I do not know how to reach Spain or to travel in it, and besides I should be slain there for not being a Christian, or

should at any rate be robbed of the treasure before or after discovering it. For these reasons it is necessary that I should be accompanied by a Spaniard, faithful and true to me, of whose life I should be master, and whom I could slay with a single word, like you, Juan Falgueira, who, after all, have not done very well by robbery and murder, since you are toiling here like a mule, when, with the share of the treasure I would give you, you could go elsewhere to some other part of the world and enjoy yourself. What do you think of my proposal?"

"That it is very well put together for a Moor," answered Ben-Munera, from whose strong hands, crossed behind his back, the bar of iron hung down quivering like a tiger's tail.

Manos-gordas smiled proudly, thinking that his proposal was accepted.

"Nevertheless," continued the gloomy Galician, "you have made a mistake."

"In what?" asked Manos-gordas, drawing himself up with the air of a man about to listen to some nonsensical objection.

"You did not reckon that I should be a fool to go with you to Spain to put you in possession of one half of a treasure, expecting you to put me in possession of the other half. You would only have to denounce me the day we reached Aldeire and you would be free of my company and of the necessity for giving me half the wealth discovered. You are not as clever as I thought you were, but only a poor fellow worthy of pity, who has taken a blind alley in shewing me the indications of this wealth, and telling me at the same time that you know my story, and that if I were with you in Spain you would be the absolute master of my life. But what need have I of you? What aid of yours do I lack to

secure the whole treasure? What were you to me from the moment that you read me that parchment; from the moment in which it was in my power to take it from you?"

"What do you say?" shrieked Manos-gordas, feeling the chill of approaching death run through his bones.

"I say nothing. I act," replied Juan Falgueira, dealing a terrible blow with the iron bar at the head of Ben-Carime, who fell to the ground a corpse.

XI.

THREE or four weeks after the death of Manos-gordas, in the last week of February, snow was falling heavily at Aldeire, and throughout the Sierra Nevada.

It was the first Sunday in Lent, and the church-bell was summoning to mass the sorely chilled Christians of that parish, so unpleasantly near heaven, who, however, did not seem very much inclined to quit their hearths and homes in such rough and inclement weather.

Such, at any rate, was the view of Tio Juan Gomez, despite the arguments of his more pious wife, Señá Torcuata, who was begging him not to eat any more "roscas," or drink any more brandy, but to accompany her to mass like a good Christian, when, in the midst of their dispute, Tio Genaro, the head shepherd, entered the kitchen, and said:—

"God give you good day, Señor Juan and Señá Torcuata. I have something to tell you about what has been happening out at the back there, which is why I have come down here in such weather instead of going to hear mass."

"Come, come," interrupted the Mayor's wife. "Now you

will be chattering and drinking all day. You will be damned, Juan, if you do not soon make your peace with the Church and give up this cursed mayoralty."

She had, however, to start without her husband, who pushing a glass and a "rosco" towards the shepherd, said,

"Woman's nonsense, Tio Genaro, sit down and tell me all about it. What has been taking place?"

"Only this, that last evening the goatherd Francisco saw a man dressed like a native of Malaga and wrapped up in a cloak enter the new enclosure and wander round the Moor's Tower, studying it and measuring it like a master-builder. Francisco asked him what he wanted, and the stranger in reply asked who the owner of the tower was. On Francisco telling him that it was no one less than the Mayor of the town, he said that he would see your worship in course of the evening and explain what he wanted. Night came on and the man seemingly went off, on which the goatherd retired to his cabin, which you know is hard by. Two hours after dark he heard very strange noises in the tower, and saw a light, which so alarmed him that he did not dare venture out to my cabin to inform me until it was daylight, when he told me the circumstance and that the noises had continued all night. As I have served the King, and am not easily frightened, I went at once to the tower, accompanied by Francisco, who was all of a tremble, and found the stranger wrapped in his cloak sleeping in a room on the lower floor that has still a roof over it. I awoke this suspicious individual and asked him what he meant by sleeping in a strange house without the owner's leave, when he answered me that it was not a house but only a pile of ruins where there was no harm in a poor traveller taking shelter on a snowy night, and that he was ready to call on your worship and explain matters. He has accordingly

come with me and is at the yard door with the goatherd awaiting your leave to come in."

"Let him come in," answered Tio Hormiga, jumping up greatly excited, for it had occurred to him from the very beginning of the shepherd's story that all this must have something to do with the treasure, the search for which by his unaided endeavours he had given up a week past, though not until after uselessly and futilely removing a number of heavy stones well cemented together.

XII.

THE stranger and Tio Juan Gomez found themselves face to face, and alone.

"What is your name?" enquired the latter, with all the authority of a mayor, and without asking the other to sit down.

"My name is Jaime Olot," answered the unknown.

"Your accent seems a foreign one. Are you English?"

"I am a Catalan."

"Eh, a Catalan? Yes, that may be so. But what brings you here, and above all what the devil were you about yesterday measuring in my tower?"

"I will tell you. My avocation is that of a miner, and I have come to seek work in this district, celebrated for its silver and copper mines. Yesterday, on passing by the Moor's Tower, I saw that with the stones taken from it a cattle fold was being erected, and that it would be necessary to extract a good many more to complete the circuit. I am accustomed to works of demolition, and it occurred to me to offer to pull down the whole of the tower by contract, that is if I can come to an understanding with the owner."

Tio Hormiga winked his grey eyes and replied indifferently,

"Well, Señor, such an arrangement would not suit me."

"I would do the whole job very cheaply, almost for nothing."

"That would suit me still less."

The so-styled Jaime Olot stared hard at Tio Juan Gomez as though to divine the real import of this strange reply, but not being able to read anything in his worship's foxy physiognomy, added with feigned carelessness :

"It might also suit me to restore part of that old building and to live in it, cultivating the land you mean to enclose. I will buy the Moor's Tower and the surrounding land of you."

"It does not suit me to sell," replied Tio Hormiga.

"But I will pay you double its worth," said the self-styled Catalan emphatically.

"For that very reason it suits me less," repeated the Andalucian with such an insulting air of superior cunning that his interlocutor took a step backwards as though aware that he was treading on dangerous ground.

After reflecting for a moment or so he raised his head, crossed his arms, and said, laughing cynically,

"Then you know that there is a treasure?"

Tio Juan Gomez sank back in his chair, and looking up at the Catalan exclaimed :

"What surprises me is that you should know of it."

"Then you will be much more astonished when I tell you that I am the only one who knows it with certainty."

"You mean that you know the exact spot where the treasure is hidden?"

"I do know the exact spot, and it would not take me twenty-four hours to lay bare all the wealth lying there."

"If this is so, have you a certain document?"

"Yes, Señor, I have a parchment of the time of the Moors, half a yard square, in which everything is explained."

"And this parchment?"

"I do not carry it about with me, nor is there any need for me to do so, since I know its contents by heart, both in Arabic and Spanish. Oh! no, I am not such a fool as to expose myself to capture with arms and baggage. That is why before venturing ~~into~~ to this district I hid the parchment where I alone can find it."

"In that case the only thing is to come to an understanding like two good friends, Señor Jaime Olot," said the Mayor, pouring out a glass of brandy and offering it to the stranger.

"Yes, let us come to an understanding," replied the latter, sitting down without more ceremony and emptying the glass.

"Tell me," said Tio Hormiga, "and tell me truly, in order that I may believe in your good faith——"

"Ask away, I will be silent when it suits me to conceal anything."

"Do you come from Madrid?"

"No, Señor, it is five and twenty years since I was there for the first and last time."

"Do you come from the Holy Land?"

"No, Señor, I have never been there."

"Do you know a lawyer at Ugijar, named Don Matias de Quesada?"

"No, Señor, I hate all lawyers and their breed?"

"Then how did you get hold of the parchment?"

Jaime Olot remained silent.

"That suits me, I see that you do not want to lie," exclaimed the Mayor. "But it is also certain that Don Matias de Quesada has deceived me, cheating me out of two gold onzas, and then selling the document to some one at Melilla or Ceuta. For it is certain that although you are not a Moor, you bear traces of having been in Africa."

Do not worry yourself or lose time. I can relieve you from doubt. This lawyer must have sent the parchment to a Spaniard at Centa, from whom it was stolen three weeks ago by the Moor who transferred it to me."

"Ah! I have it. He must have sent it to his nephew, who is organist at the cathedral there, one Bonifacio Tudela."

"That is not unlikely."

"Rascal of a Don Matias! To trick his old friend like that! But see how chance has brought back the parchment into my hands."

"Or rather into mine," observed the stranger.

"Into ours," exclaimed the Mayor, refilling the glass with brandy. "So, Señor, we are millionaires. Let us divide the treasure, share and share alike, since you cannot dig in that ground without my leave, nor I find the treasure without the help of the parchment which has become yours. Fate has made us brothers. From to-day you shall live with me. Another glass. And as soon as it is daylight to-morrow we will begin to dig."

Matters had reached this stage when the Señora Torcuata returned from mass. Her husband told her all that had happened, and introduced Señor Jaime Olot. The good woman heard with equal fear and joy that the treasure was about to make its appearance, appealed to the saints repeatedly on hearing of the treachery and baseness of Don Matias, and viewed the stranger, whose physiognomy appeared to her to presage misfortunes, with alarm.

Learning that she would have to give that individual something to eat, she went to the larder in quest of its choicest contents, not without muttering to herself:

"It is high time the treasure did turn up, since whether it does or does not after all, it has cost us the thirty-two

duros for the famous cup of chocolate, the old friendship of Don Matias, and brought up such an ill-looking stranger as a guest. Accursed be treasures, and mines, and devils, and everything else beneath the surface of the earth, except the well-springs and the blessed dead."

XIII.

THE Señora Torcuata with these ideas in her head, and a frying-pan in either hand, was approaching the cooking-stove when shouts and outcries were heard in the street, together with voices exclaiming :

"Señor Mayor, open the door. The officers of justice from the city are entering the town with a number of soldiers."

Jaime Olot turned as white as a sheet on hearing these words, and said :

"Hide me, Señor. If not we shall never have the treasure. The police are in quest of me."

"In quest of you ! Why ? Are you a criminal ?"

"I said so," exclaimed Tia Torcuata. "No good could come out of such a face as that. It is all a trick of Lucifer."

"Quick, quick," said the stranger. "Let me out through the yard door."

"Very well. But tell me first where the treasure lies," expostulated Tio Hormiga.

"Señor Mayor," cried those without, "open ! The town is surrounded. It seems that they are seeking the man who has been with you for the last hour."

"Open in the name of the law !" cried an imperative voice, accompanied by a series of sounding blows on the door.

"There is no help for it," said the Mayor, proceeding to

open the door, whilst the stranger made his way to the back door leading into the yard.

But the shepherd and goatherd were on the alert to block his way, and, with the aid of the soldiers, who had also entered at the back, seized and secured him without any injury, although in the struggle he displayed the strength and activity of a tiger.

The chief constable of the district, who had under his orders a clerk and twenty infantry soldiers, explained to the alarmed Mayor the reason of this capture.

"This man," he said, "with whom you were locked in, why, I know not, and with whom you were talking, of I know not what matters, is the well-known Galician, Juan Falgueira, who fifteen years ago robbed and murdered some gentleman, in whose service he was as muleteer, near Grenada. On the eve of his execution he escaped in the garb of the friar appointed to prepare him for death, leaving him behind half strangled. A fortnight back the Government received a letter from Ceuta, signed by a Moor named Manos-gordas, stating that Juan Falgueira, after having resided for a considerable time in Oran and other parts of Africa, was on the point of embarking for Spain, and that it would be easy to lay hands on him at Aldeire, where he was thinking of buying a Moorish tower. At the same time the Consul-General at Tetuan wrote to say that a Moorish woman named Zama had called to inform him that a Spanish renegade named Ben-Munuza, formerly styled Juan Falgueira, had sailed for Spain after having murdered her husband, a Moor, named Manos-gordas, and stolen a certain valuable parchment from him. On account of all this, and notably for the assault upon the friar, the King especially enjoined upon the authorities of Grenada the capture of this ruffian, and his immediate execution in that city."

The horror and astonishment of the bystanders and the agony of Tio Hormiga, who could no longer have the least doubt that the precious parchment was in the power of a man sentenced to death, may be imagined.

The avaricious Mayor, however, at the risk of compromising himself even more deeply, returned to call Juan Falgueira on one side and whisper with him, after taking the precaution to say he wished only to ascertain whether the culprit would confess his faults to God and man. The conversation between the two partners ran as follows:

"Partner," said Tio Hormiga, "nothing can save you. But it would be a pity for the parchment to be lost. Tell me where you have hidden it."

"Partner," replied the Galician, "with the help of that parchment, or rather the treasure it represents, I hope to purchase my freedom. Obtain me the King's pardon, and I will give it up to you. Meanwhile I shall make an offer of it to the judges, to get them to declare that my crime has been purged by fifteen years of exile."

"Partner," observed Tio Hormiga, "you are a deep one, and I hope your plans will succeed. But if they should fail, I beg you, for God's sake, not to carry to the tomb a secret that will profit no one."

"I shall, though," replied Juan Falgueira, "I must avenge myself on the world somehow."

"Come, let us make a start," cried the constable, putting an end to this curious interview.

And the doomed man was marched off by the soldiers in the direction of the city of Guadix, whence he was to be taken to Grenada.

"The devil! the devil!" exclaimed the wife of Juan Gomez. "Cursed be all treasures."

XIV.

It is hardly necessary to say that Tio Hormiga did not succeed in obtaining a pardon for Juan Fulgueira, that the judges did not pay any serious attention to the offers made to them by the latter of a treasure if they would acquit him, and that the terrible Galician refused to reveal either the hiding-place of the parchment or the site of the treasure to the Mayor of Aldeire, who, in the hope of inducing him to make disclosures, visited him in the jail of Grenada on the eve of his execution.

Juan Falgueira was executed ; and on the return of Tio Hormiga to Aldeire he fell sick of a fever, brought on by fatigue and disappointment, which fever carried him off in a few days.

Before dying he managed to write a letter to Don Matias de Quesada, reproaching him for his treachery and fraud, which had cost three men their lives, and pardoning him, as a Christian should, on condition of his refunding the thirty-two duros to the Señá Torcuata.

This formidable letter reached Ugijar at the same time as the news of the death of Juan Gomez, and so affected the old lawyer that he too expired shortly afterwards, not without writing before his last hour a terrible epistle, full of insults and curses, to his nephew, the organist of the cathedral at Ceuta, accusing him of having robbed and deceived him, and of being the cause of his death.

To the perusal of this well-founded and appalling accusation may be traced the apoplectic stroke that carried off Don Bonifacio.

And as the Señá Torcuata, the only other person left who knew anything about the fatal parchment which had

caused the deaths of five people, took especial care never to breathe a word about it during her life—being firmly persuaded that all these deaths were the direct work of the devil, and due to the association of her husband with the enemies of the altar and the throne—no one has yet succeeded in laying hands upon the Moorish treasure.

THE END.

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